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Politics: Power and Authority in Shakespeare's Early Histories

by

Faith Nostbakken

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Abstract

An appropriate approach to Shakespeare's early histories, 1, 2, and 3 Henry VI, and Richard III, has for its foundation a conceptual framework that emphasizes the dynamic nature of power and authority as political relationships among individuals and nations. Shakespeare dramatizes the way in which the interaction of people and ideologies generates the events of public conflict. The ideologies legitimating the social orders of medieval and Renaissance England derived from common appeals to a Christian God, to law, and to the family. Shakespeare portrays the collapse of authority in the fifteenth century not simply as an open partisan conflict, but as the culmination of competing and contradictory claims to the assumptions of legitimacy. In the breakdown of order, the source of power becomes competition rather than mutuality. While the three Henry VI plays concentrate on the ambiguities of authority, Richard III emphasizes the complex nature of political power, portrayed not simply as the aggression of confrontation, but rather as a function of will, persuasion, force, and fear. In the psychological and relative nature of power and in the inconsistent interpretations of authority, Shakespeare dramatizes the complexity of politics as the tension between rights and capabilities of rule.

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I. Introduction

In a discussion of Shakespeare and his contemporary playwrights, David Bevington proposes that "politics is germane to a remarkable percentage of Tudor plays, but in terms of ideas and platforms rather than personalities."[1] Wilbur Sanders suggests, on the other hand, that for Shakespeare "the focus is on political man, not political theory."[2] Politics, however, is about the interaction and conflict between personalities and platforms: individuals responding without ideologies act in a private rather than a public world, and platforms existing independent from personalities represent political theory rather than political reality. Shakespeare's histories dramatize the politics of the past. His more masterful use of the English language and his deeper exploration into the subtleties and complexities of character in his later histories have stimulated more interest in them than in his earlier works. However, his first tetralogy deserves fuller recognition than it is typically granted for its perceptive portrayal of the intricate interdependence of the people and ideas that define the realm of political experience.

Power and authority provide the dynamic dimension of politics, and while critics who approach 1, 2, and 3 Henry VI and Richard III usually explore some aspect of the power struggles dominating the dramatic action, their discussions can be made clearer and more useful by a conceptual foundation for political study. This thesis proposes an analysis of Shakespeare's early histories based on three major assumptions about power and authority. First, the two are related but not equivalent terms. Power is the ability to rule; authority is the right to rule. Authority is one means for achieving stable power, but force and persuasion are alternative tactics for governing and controlling individuals and societies. Secondly, power and authority are not simply states of being or traits of character, but exist as relationships among people and between nations. Political power is meaningful only in the comparative sense that one person or group is more or less powerful and thus more or less successful and

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[1] David Bevington, Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1968), 25.

[2] Wilbur Sanders, The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare (Cambridge: University Press, 1968), 152.

effective than another. Authority, on the other hand, implies a balance based on mutuality or reciprocity. As Dickerson and Flanagan say, "No one has authority as such; one has it only if others respect and obey it. Authority is one pole of a relationship of which the other pole is legitimacy."[3] A third significant aspect of this framework is that authority, in order to be legitimate, must be derived from identifiable sources acknowledged and accepted by subjects and rulers alike. The sources vary and evolve through history, but during the medieval and Renaissance periods the primary foundations for public order were appeals to a Christian God, to law, and to the family.

The first tetralogy presents the breakdown of authority in fifteenth-century England and portrays the illegitimate uses of power both contributing to and resulting from the expanding conditions of political chaos. Shakespeare's account reflects the historical context of his drama and his time, while offering timeless insights into the complex and ambiguous nature of the human relationships that generate the events of political conflict. From an historical perspective, the playwright represents concurrent attitudes towards sanctified kingship, legal rights, and familial inheritance, which in conflict with one another prevent the possibility of a cohesive, consistent claim for public order. From a more universal perspective, he demonstrates the way in which ideologies, applied and interpreted by subjective political actors, frequently challenge and undermine the authority that both the people and the ideas aim to maintain. Moreover, in terms of authority and particularly in terms of power, the first tetralogy dramatizes the diverse tactics of action and aspects of experience that influence and determine the political life of a nation. Given this context of multiplicity, the distinction made by one critic between the power of sorcery and words and the power of the world,[4] or the remark made by another that Richard III succeeds "with no real power of his own,"[5] is entirely misleading, for the political scope of Shakespeare's drama

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[3]Mark Dickerson and Thomas Flanagan, eds., An Introduction to Government and Politics: A Conceptual Approach (Toronto: Methuen Publications, 1982), 12.

[4] Marilyn French, "Power: The First Tetralogy," Shakespeare's Division of Experience (New York: Summit Books, 1981), 62.

[5]Tracy Strong, "Shakespeare: Elizabethan Statecraft and Machiavellianism," in The

must certainly go beyond the limited view that his "plays offer a political surface inasmuch as their action is public action."[4]

[3](cont'd) Artist and Political Vision, eds. Benjamin Barber & M.J. Gargas McGrath (New York: Transaction Books, 1982), 209.

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[4]John Alvis, "Introductory: Shakespearean Poetry and Politics," in Shakespeare as Political Thinker, eds. John Alvis & Thomas G. West (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 1981), 4-5.

II. Divine Authority and the Tudor Myth

A common source of political authority for the realm of public action in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the appeal to a powerful and just Christian God. Divine sanction of kingship lay at the center of the political system, and Providential influences were interpreted as guides and mediators among the king, nobility, parliament, and common citizens. For Shakespeare's literary predecessors writing the chronicles of English history, Providence provided the thematic continuity for civil strife and instability in the fifteenth century. Shakespeare relies on these chroniclers for his plots and, likewise, includes divine authority as a justification for political rule and as an explanation for political misrule. His dramatic portrayal of divinely sanctioned action, however, has been a subject of considerable debate. To some, notably to the influential critic E.M.W. Tillyard,[1] Shakespeare simply affirms or restates the Elizabethan view of Providential order, and the Tudor Myth organizes the history tetralogies in a pattern of divine punishment and restoration for the English nation. To others, Shakespeare challenges and rejects the commonplaces of his time. Jan Kott, for instance, sees not order, but irrational violence in the plays, and says, "In Shakespeare's royal Histories there is only hate, lust, and violence: the Grand Mechanism, which transforms the executioner into a victim, and the victim into an executioner."[2] Many recent critics interpret Shakespeare's drama from neither of the two extremes, order or chaos, but focus on the independent actions of the characters on stage who are free from divine intervention.[3] Henry A. Kelly in his landmark study on the significance of political myths is particularly insightful in recommending that it is best "to regard opinions concerning the

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[1] E.M.W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays (London: Chatto and Windus, 1944).

[2] Jan Kott, Shakespeare our Contemporary (London: Methuen & Co., 1965), 38.

[3] Frank W. Brownlow, for example, says that the causes of evil in the plays "are in the men themselves. There is no demonstrable external agency," "The Way to Dover Cliff: Henry VI to Richard II: Property, Possession, and the Crown," Two Shakespeare Sequences: 'Henry VI' to Richard II' and 'Pericles' to 'Timon of Athens' (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), 36. Michael Manheim similarly speaks of "a chaos caused exclusively by human irresponsibility, not Divine Providence," (The Weak King Dilemma in the Shakespearean History Play (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 103.

providential outcome of solitary events as characterizing only the sentiments of the speakers at the time in which they speak them, and not Shakespeare's own view."[4] But the tendency of most interpretations is to see or implicitly accept as a dichotomy the individualism of characters and the providentialism of divine control, and to undermine one in favor of the other. Even Henry Kelly goes no farther than to separate the partisan attitudes of the individual characters from the playwright's overall dramatic purpose. However, Shakespeare's political drama appears to be based on an integrated rather than a dichotomous approach to cause and effect. In his early histories, he portrays the collapse of authority as a result of the interaction between the two political constituents: responsible, independent individuals and the beliefs of ideology which legitimate their society.[5]

Providentialism is one of the primary legitimating assumptions of the Elizabethan period. Dollimore, in his book Radical Tragedy, points out the ideological function of religion both for those who accepted the indisputable presence of a divine Being and for philosophers following the Reformation who recognized the political expediency of belief in God rather than accepting unconditionally the truth of His existence.[6] Indeed, Dollimore's approach to Renaissance tragedy is helpful in a political study of the first tetralogy. Relying on Raymond Williams' analysis of the historical process, Dollimore stresses the transitional, time-bound nature of history such that the culture of any particular period is not unilinear, but composed of often conflicting ideologies: surviving elements of the past, dominant ideas of the present, and emerging new forms of the future.[7] The Providentialism used to legitimate

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[4] Henry Ansgar Kelly, Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 272.

[5] Ideology, according to J. Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, "is composed of those beliefs, practices and institutions which work to legitimate the social order." "History and Ideology: the Instance of Henry V," in John Drakakis, Alternative Shakespeares. London: Methuen, 1985, 210-211. Understanding authority as legitimate power makes the mutual assumptions that define authority a type of political ideology.

[6] Jonathan Dollimore, Radical Tragedy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 11.

[7] Dollimore, 7. He refers to Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121-127.

the social structures of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was not always consistent and unifying, because its concepts were subject to the evolutionary effects of history, to ideological changes and adaptations. From a theoretical standpoint, Providentialism suffered from complexities and contradictions which made it a problematic source of order, while from a human or individualist standpoint, interpretations of divine authority produced conflicting claims. Shakespeare, taking into account both aspects, portrays the concept of divine intervention in his early histories primarily as an instrument of faction rather than a means of control, as an ideological assumption that demands an awareness of ambiguities rather than offering a simple clarification of political rights.

The Christian or Providential perception of political order has its roots in a medieval culture dominated by theological modes of thought. Acknowledging the sacredness of the king was a natural way of expressing the "sacredness of that mutuality of which he was both protector and symbol."[8] While early in the development of political theology the liturgical focus of kingship stressed the Christ-like human and divine dual nature of kings, later in the Middle Ages the Crown came to be perceived as a body politic with the king as head and the magnates as limbs.[9] Subjects and king together defined the corporate character of the polity. Kantorowicz, in The King's Two Bodies, studies the development of political thought up to the Tudor period in English history and traces the influences of christology in the prevailing perception of a dualistic political system and in the traditional appeal to divine authority.

By Shakespeare's day, however, the medieval theory had been transformed into a Tudor version of divinely-sanctioned kingship. As Kantorowicz says, "the 'subjects plus King,' being incorporated with each other and forming together the body politic of the realm, were replaced by the 'King's Body politic' which now was incorporated with the 'king's Body natural.'"[10] From medieval ideology evolved the concept of divine right and the vision of a

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[8]Sanders, 148.

[9]Ernst Kantorowicz, The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theory (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), 364.

[10]Kantorowicz, 439.

king-centered government in which "the body politic of kingship appears as a likeness of the 'holy sprites and angels,' because it represents, like the angels, the Immutable within Time."[11] The king's two bodies, separate but incorporated into one person whose lesser natural body is improved by its consolidation with the Body politic, became the foundation for the Tudor doctrine of absolute monarchy. As John Danby describes the system, "Authority is vested in a person. Elizabeth is absolute in the realm of both Pope and Emperor.... According to her Homilies rebellion is always and absolutely wrong.... The duties imposed are the will of the Prince not the will of God."[12] The divine or sacred status of the king overshadowed the accompanying terms of sacred function. As Wilbur Sanders says, "Tudor absolutism, in its extreme and defensive manifestations, was a sadly gelded version of [the] mutuality, in which right had been divorced from responsibility, the contract cancelled, and in which duty devolved exclusively upon the subject."[13]

The theory of divine right as it is known today is more appropriately a seventeenth-century concept associated with the Stuart regime than an Elizabethan one.[14] Franklin le van Baumer explains, however, that while the Tudor state emphasized non-resistance more than divine right, the real vitality in the idea of ordained monarchy was more apparent in Elizabethan times "when the central government had definitely triumphed over feudal and papal sovereignty."[15] Elizabeth, sustainer of the Tudor rule, was popularly accepted as an instrument of Providence, although by the end of the century when foreign threats to the security of the regime diminished, radical minorities expressed increased scepticism about the Tudor monarchy. Thus, according to Baumer:

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[11]Kantorowicz, 8.

[12]John Danby, Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), 51.

[13]Sanders, 149.

[14] According to the ideological theory Dollimore explores, the concept of divine right may be termed an emergent cultural form in the sixteenth century and a dominant idea of the seventeenth century.

[15]Franklin le van Baumer, The Early Tudor Theory of Kingship (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), 91.

> During the early English Reformation, the cult of authority was popular because the king had come to personify English nationalism as against papal internationalism, and because he represented the people's surety against internal anarchy. It was this cult of authority which, in addition to the doctrine of Royal Supremacy, chiefly differentiated the Tudor theory of kingship from that of the fifteenth century.[16]

The historiographers, recording fifteenth-century English history and providing Shakespeare with sources for his early plays, wrote within the political context of this cult of authority and engendered in their chronicles a type of Tudor propaganda subsequently to be known as the Tudor Myth. They used and intepreted history for political purposes, for the support of the Tudor monarchy. As Larry Champion says of England:

> For a nation with an emerging sense of identity and purpose - cultural and political - [the histories] were a means both of comprehending and of emulating earlier civilizations, of drawing analogies at the same time instructive and self-enhancing, and of justifying a contemporary monarchical control which, if not edenic, was demonstrably preferable to the bloody internecine struggles it had suppressed."[17]

History for the Elizabethans became an exemplary discipline in which "Events of the past were recounted in order to provide lessons for the present."[18]

The Tudor Myth, history as lesson, the elaborate defense of the Tudor dynasty by an appeal to divine authority, is for Shakespearean critic E.M.W. Tillyard and his supporters the unifying theme not only for the chronicles of Hall and Holinshed, but for Shakespeare's history plays as well.[19] According to the myth, the deposition of Richard II - the shedding of

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[16] Baumer, 119.

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[17] Larry Champion, Perspective in Shakespeare's English Histories (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980), 1.

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[18] Henry Kelly, 4.

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[19] Critics even debate about the appropriateness of the Tudor Myth as a propagandisitic device in Hall's historical account, but that question goes beyond the focus of this thesis. Graham Holderness, however, suggests, "Shakespeare's historical sources, then, were more complex than we often take them to be. Through their compilation of the ideological conflicts inscribed in the fifteenth-century chronicles, they offered to the Eizabethan dramatists a rich and detailed repository of historical evidence, the materials necessary for a more rational and objective understanding of the past." Shakespeare's History (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 22. For challenges to the presence of the Tudor political theory in the English chronicles, see Robert Ornstein, A Kingdom for a Stage (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1972) and Henry Kelly, Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970).

the blood of God's anointed - is a sin for which God punishes England during the reigns of the next four kings. God acts through subjects and rulers to carry out a plan of divine retribution and finally to restore order with the coronation of Henry VII, the Tudor king who unites the Yorkist and Lancastrian lines and provides a happy ending to an organic piece of history. God's curse is strongest during the Wars of the Roses when both royal households are incriminated. According to Tillyard, in the first tetralogy, Shakespeare's organizing theme is the Providential purpose of and explanation for political strife. In the Henry VI plays, Joan of Arc is a scourge sent to the English nation, Henry VI's ineptitude as king serves as a punishment for Richard II's usurpation, and York is a divine instrument to challenge the Lancasters. In Richard III, Richard is God's avenging agent and Richmond's part in introducing a stable monarchy is an act of God signifying the expiation of England's sins. In Tillyard's words, "Behind all the confusion of civil war, and the more precious and emphatic because of the confusion, is the belief that the world is a part of the eternal law and that earthly mutability... is itself a part of a greater and permanent pattern."[20] The Tudor Myth imposes a perception of order on a disordered past by a Providential interpretation that requires temporal boundaries around a specific portion of history.

An examination of Shakespeare's first four history plays in terms of Tillyard's assumptions requires a preliminary look at the inconsistencies in and the inadequacies of the Tudor doctrine. A theological belief in the sacrosanctity of kingship conflicts with the historical supposition that God bestowed his favor on a particular king, Henry VII. The Tudor proponents applied their theory of divine sanction to facts that supported their political bias. The contradiction in the Tudor Myth has led Henry Kelly to suggest that in the transition between medieval and Renaissance periods of English history there was not one myth but three: the Lancastrian, the Yorkist, and the Tudor myths.[21] Each faction adopted a Providential justification for its actions, and the prevailing myth at any point in history belonged to the most powerful or ruling faction.

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[20] Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, 150.

[21] H. Kelly, 9.

While the Tudor union of theological and political assumptions is problematic, a retrospective imposition of the Tudor Myth on the sixteenth century provides a simplistic, inaccurate representation of Elizabethan political perceptions. According to Robin Headlam Wells, "the twenty-year period when Shakespeare wrote most of his plays was not one of intellectual uniformity, but a time of social unrest and energetic political controversy."[22] Graham Holderness explains:

> Not every Elizabethan accepted the state's official ideology: there were Catholics who thought differently from Protestants, Puritans who thought differently from either, and not only about religion; there were apologists for absolute monarchy and opponents of it.[23]

Indeed, the perpetration of political myths arose as much from the need for monarchical security as from an increase in English nationalism or a sincere belief in the divine ordination of public events. The Tudor propaganda of the monarchical supporters, while it replaced Yorkist and Lancastrian loyalties in Shakespeare's time, was itself challenged by political dissidents and also by a growing interest in a humanistic perspective of history.

An interest in responsible human action raises questions not only about Tudor attitudes but about a Providential view of history in general. Sanders, referring to a concept of divine intervention, says:

> A God so directly in control of human affairs is, of course, open to charges of maladministration and injustice; and it is here that the providential theory immediately begins to reveal its evasiveness.... The ill fortune of the wicked is a sign of God's wrath; but the ill fortune of the just is a sign of his love. The good man who prospers is being rewarded for his righteousness, but the evil man who prospers is being deluded with worldly success in preparation for his eventual condemnation at the Day of Judgment.[24]

A scheme that provides identical reasons for antithetical actions is an unsatisfying and insufficient explanation for the unfolding of temporal history.

Critics approaching Shakespeare find themselves trying to define and confine Providence in order to understand his plays. Michael Quinn, differentiating between general

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[22]Robin Headlam Wells, Shakespeare, Politics and the State (Houndmills: MacMillan Ed., 1986), 1.

[23]Holderness, 19-20.

[24]Sanders, 112.

and particular Providence, suggests that Shakespeare focuses on the particular Providence involved in the immediate cause and effect of characters' actions rather than on the general pattern of punished crime and triumphant virtue.[25] Wilbur Sanders proposes for Shakespeare's plays a natural Providence, "an organic human process by which the diseased soul disintegrates under the weight of its own evil, and the diseased society purges itself."[26] Brownlow distinguishes between ultimate and immediate causes of events such that "Providence may punish, but it does so through men's own, consenting wills."[27] Indeed, the debate arises because critics recognize that Shakespeare's drama offers a broader scope than political propaganda. While Tudor ideals are simplistic, the balance between divine and human action is complex. The whole question of divine sanction for good and evil actions, the belief that history is in the hands of God and that he chooses political sides, and the traditional association of God with the king make the issue of divine authority highly ambiguous. Shakespeare, writing his early histories, places himself at the heart of this political controversy as he dramatizes the public realm where ideology and action converge.

The rights of kingship, which lay at the center of the fifteenth-century political system, are issues addressed by Shakespeare's competing kings. Certainly, a pure concept of divine right, a view of the king as God's anointed whose two bodies represent the substance of the nation, is for the character of Henry VI little more than a dubious claim or a corruptible theory. Indeed, once Richard II has been deposed, a belief in the divine appointment of kings is challenged by any succeeding monarch, and the Tudor rulers themselves were careful to avoid that contentious aspect of their own ideology. Only when Henry VI returns to England as a banished, deposed king does he invoke his divine authority,

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[25]Michael Quinn, "Providence in Shakespeare's Yorkist Plays," Shakespeare Quarterly 10 (1959): 47.

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[26]Sanders, 95. His concept amounts to little more than a doctrine of no Providence. While he bases his interpretation on the philosophies of Renaissance writers such as Hooker, who saw the working of God through nature, Sanders' approach tends to dismiss the significance of the many references by Shakespeare's characters to God's direct part in history. Their attitudes and beliefs, however, prove to be an integral and influential part of their political activity.

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[27]Brownlow, 52.

and then he does so as a defeated and disillusioned king. He says to himself, "Thy place is fill'd, thy sceptre wrung from thee,/ Thy balm wash'd off wherewith thou was anointed./ No bending knee will call thee Caesar now."[28] The favor of God is not powerful enough to withstand a confrontation with the will of the people. Challenging the two keepers who claim allegiance to their new king, Edward, Henry invokes the principle of kingship as an inherent part of his own physical existence and asks, "Am I dead? Do I not breathe a man?" (3H6.III.i.82). But he soon acquiesces in their commands as he recognizes that the life-long sanctioned right of kingship simply does not exist for him. "Gone also is the fiction of royal prerogatives of any kind, and all that remains is the feeble human nature of a king."[29]

If the subjects violate divine right by deposing their king, Henry VI violates his right by allowing the separation of his two bodies and declaring, "My crown is in my heart, not on my head" (3H6.III.i.62). Kantorowicz's description of Richard II applies equally well to Henry VI's condition: "Invisible his kingship, and relegated to within: visible his flesh, and exposed to contempt and derision or to pity and mockery."[30] Banished and then imprisoned, Henry retains little of the dignity embodied in an ordained minister of God. His kingly stature is diminished and, even when he ascends to the throne again for a brief time, he does not permit a consolidation of his two bodies. He makes Warwick and Clarence the effective national rulers: the two Protectors "yoke together like a double shadow/ To Henry's body, and supply his place" (3H6.IV.vi.49-50). Theoretically, they become Henry's body politic. The protected and privileged role of the divinely ordained is for Henry a weakly asserted and corruptible ideal rather than a fact.

Edward IV, whose reign occurs within and following Henry VI's, more closely represents the Elizabethan version of the authoritative king, although he is presented as an unsympathetic, autocratic character. He is the ruler who can assert to his brothers, "I am

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[28]William Shakespeare, 3 Henry VI in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 686. All Shakespeare's quotations are from this text.

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[29]Kantorowicz, 30.

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[30]Kantorowicz, 37.

Edward,/ Your king and Warwick's, and must have my will" (3H6.IV.i.15-16). Edward's philosophy that "my will shall stand for law" (3H6.IV.i.50) aligns him with the Tudor absolutists who view the king's central position as the embodiment of the political system. Body natural and body politic are incorporated into his one will, and he is equally privileged to ignore state policy in choosing his own queen and to command military forces in the civil war. When he temporarily loses his crown to Henry VI, the Yorkist king, unlike the resigned Henry VI, declares, "Edward will always bear himself as king" (3H6.IV.iii.45), a statement that affirms Edward's faith in the immutability of his sanctioned position. However, he never appeals directly to God as the source of his right. And when he concludes 3 Henry VI, saying, "And now what rests but that we spend the time/ With stately triumphs, mirthful comic shows,/ Such as befits the pleasure of the court?" (3H6.V.vii.42-44), his call for state celebrations in his victory, particularly in contrast to attitudes voiced by the meek King Henry VI, indicates a greater interest in the Tudor concern for the sacred status of the king than in the corresponding sacred function.

Richard III, who follows his authoritative brother to the throne, also preserves the idea of divine ordination and the iconic relationship between the two bodies, but his questionable right to the throne and his means of achieving it deprive the kingly images of their sacred meaning. In Act III.vii, when Richard appears before the Mayor and citizens to be persuaded to be king, he enters "aloft, between two Bishops," an appearance which B.G. Lyons points out imitates the traditional and legendary visual representation of the king anointed by the Church.[31] Richard, however, contrives this mock coronation himself, creating an obvious tension between public symbol and private purpose. Later his response to his mother's reproaches, "Let not the heavens hear these tell-tale women/ Rail on the Lord's anointed" (R3.IV.iv.150-151), is no more than an appeal to common assumptions of authority simply to silence the bothersome complaints. If Henry's feeble claim to divine right is clouded by the question of usurpation, Richard's claim is lost entirely in his profanation of the rituals and symbols themselves, while his deformed natural body cloaks a soul too morally

[31]Bridget Gellert Lyons, "'King's Games': Stage Imagery and Political Symbolism in Richard III," Criticism 20 (1978): 22.

corrupt to be incorporated with a body politic in the "likeness of the 'holy sprites and angels.'"[32] For Henry VI, divine authority is a theory at odds with reality; for Edward IV, divine authority is transmuted into a sacred position reserved for himself alone; for Richard III, divine authority merely exists as public language and symbols that he can manipulate for personal power. The various attitudes expressed by Shakespeare's ruling characters suggest that ambiguities in and uncertainties about the theory of kingship subject the position of authority to the interests and interpretations of those who fill it.

While holy, sanctioned kingship as a traditional political theory is not positively portrayed in any of the three ruling characters, Shakespeare does not unconditionally adopt the contemporary historical view by portraying Henry's governing problems simply as the result of divine punishment. The Tillyardian focus on the Tudor Myth may be appropriate in an examination of Shakespeare's primary sources, Hall and Holinshed, but it is less valid in a discussion of the first tetralogy. While Tillyard claims the audience is never allowed to forget that Henry IV's usurpation was the beginning of England's civil discord,[33] Shakespeare only mentions Richard II five times in the four plays[34] in references that primarily treat Richard's deposition as a political fact rather than an affront to divine will. Mortimer mentions Richard II in a speech to Plantagenet in 1 Henry VI, but emphasizes legal justice rather than his own role as God's agent. York, in his genealogical account in 2 Henry VI, II.ii, uses Richard II's murder simply to increase sympathy for himself.[35] And even in the last reference in Richard III, III.iii, when Rivers, Grey, and Vaughan face their own executions, Richard is not seen as a cause of their grief but simply as a mutual victim of political intrigue at Pomfret Tower. By not portraying the catastrophes of the present simply as an "inescapable

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[32]Kantorowicz, 8.

[33] Tillyard, 147.

[34]References to Richard II appear in 1 Henry VI II.v, 2 Henry VI II.ii and IV.i, 3 Henry VI I.i, and Richard III III.iii.

[35]A.L. French, "Henry VI and the Ghost of Richard III," English Studies 50 (1959) Supplement: xli.

inheritance from the distant past,"[36] Shakespeare frees his characters to enact a more realistic version of politics in which people rather than ghosts determine the course of events.

Focusing on the actors rather than on the past, Irving Ribner suggests that Shakespeare emphasizes the consequences of sins committed during Henry's reign rather than of crimes against Richard II.[37] From this standpoint, one can examine a second common hypothesis of the chroniclers, that God was displeased with Henry's marriage to Margaret and permitted disasters for that reason. Clearly this is Hall's attitude, for he says:

> This mariage semed to many, bothe infortunate, and vnprofitable to the realme of England, and that for many causes.... But moste of all it should seme, that God with his matrimony was not content. For after this spousage the kynges freneds fell from hym. [38]

Shakespeare, however, portrays Henry's marriage as an act of political incompetence, but does not allude to God's role. Gloucester condemns the move for its national, material consequences, saying to his peers, "Fatal this marriage, cancelling your fame,/ Blotting your names from books of memory,/... Defacing monuments of conquer'd France,/ Undoing all, as all had never been!" (2H6.I.i.99-103). Edward, too, blames Margaret for the tumult, but makes no reference to the part of Providence. Indeed, what the audience sees is a weak king manipulated into matrimony by Suffolk, a designing lord enchanted by a French princess and willing to abuse the king's innocence to satisfy his own desires. That the love affair between Suffolk and Margaret is largely Shakespeare's own invention stresses his interest in the cause and effect of political decisions. Thus neither Tillyard nor Ribner accurately accounts for the political unrest by his interpretation. Actions, past or present, for which Henry VI allegedly suffers divine punishment Shakespeare either ignores or presents without a Providential emphasis.

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[36]J.P. Brockbank, "The Frame of Disorder - Henry VI," in Shakespeare's Histories: An Anthology of Modern Criticism, ed. William A. Armstrong (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1972), 121

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[37]Irving Ribner, The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1965), 105.

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[38]Edward Hall, Hall's Chronicle [Printed by Richard Grafton in 1548 and 1550] (New York: A.M.S. Press, Inc., 1965), 205.

Focus on sin stresses man's relationship to God at the expense of the more immediate subject of history, the interaction between men and women. The problem with the Tudor Myth in providing a unifying vision for Shakespeare's two tetralogies based on a large Providential scheme is two-fold: the vision is not apparent during the civil war, and the scheme detracts from the decisions and actions made by the characters on stage.

Nevertheless, despite the absence of an obvious overriding Providential perspective, Providence is an important concept for Shakespeare's characters, and King Henry VI is the chief example of a man relying completely on the disposition of Providence for himself and his nation. When he officially accepts his responsibilities as ruler and releases Gloucester from the duties as Protector, Henry VI says, "God shall be my hope,/ My stay, my guide, and lanthorn to my feet" (2H6.II.iii.24-25). He implicitly trusts the eternal Ruler to direct him in his public duties and accepts both good and bad fortune as signs of God's control. When Cade's rebellion is suppressed, the King rejoices, "Great God, how just art thou!" (2H6.V.i.68). Yet when York's army threatens to overtake him, Henry is equally submissive, asking, "Can we outrun the heavens?" (2H6.V.i.73). His Providential perspective is rather ambiguous in that it encompasses attitudes of confidence and resignation, of hope and despair. He shares the Tudors' undiscriminating interpretation of events, but he does not express a Tudor view of history. Even when he believes that he loses the battle at St. Albans according to God's will, "there is nothing in the play to indicate that he feels he has injured York in any way, or that he or his family is deserving of divine punishment." [39] For Henry VI, Providence is a guide not because he is a king, but because he is a Christian; defeat is his end not because he is a usurper, but because it is part of God's eternal plan. The political consequences of a king whose "mind is bent to holiness" (2H6.I.iii.55) and "Whose church-like humors fits not for a crown" (2H6.I.i.247) become apparent in the necessary interaction between the governor and the governed. For Shakespeare's Henry VI, an appeal to the divine is less frequently a sanction for his actions than an explanation for his inaction. It is not so much a source of authority as an excuse for his declining control.

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[39]H. Kelly, 261.

For authority is a relationship rather than a state of mind, and Henry's Providential perspective does little to establish a mutual acceptance of his right to rule. His piety makes him naive enough to believe the false miracle that Gloucester, the more astute character, can expose. Such naivety does not inspire respect. His peace-loving nature makes him an incompetent military leader for the nation and causes Clifford to say in battle, "I would your Highness would depart the field,/ The Queen hath best success when you are absent" (3H6.II.ii.73-74). The King's devotion to God impels Margaret to say, "I would the college of the Cardinals/ Would choose him Pope and carry him to Rome,/ And set the triple crown upon his head - / That were a state fit for his holiness" (2H6.I.iii.61-64). King Henry's Christian virtues ironically undermine kingship as a holy, reverenced function and weaken the essential control at the center of the political structure. Consequently, his Providential preoccupation inspires not mutual but multiple ideological assumptions, and England becomes a battlefield of subjects struggling to be kings.[40]

In portraying York, the initial and primary contender to the throne in this conflict, Shakespeare deliberately avoids the unifying possibilities of Providence by excluding the divinely ordained function portrayed in the chronicle sources. Hall's York says:

> Yet in the middes of this affliccion, and to make an end of thesame, God of his ineffable goodnes, lookyng on this countrey, with his iyes of pitie, and aspect of mercie, hath sent me in the truth, to restore again this decayed kyngdom to his auncient fame & olde renoume.[41]

In Shakespeare's rendition, York merely claims a right to the throne on hereditary principles, saying, "A day will come when York shall claim his own,/ ... Nor shall proud Lancaster usurp my right,/ Nor hold the sceptre in his childish fist" (2H6.I.i.239-245). Later, when York apostrophizes on the crown, saying, "Ah, sancta majestas! who would not buy thee

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[40]Indeed, it is more appropriate to observe Henry's interpretation of Providence as it affects the kingdom than to discuss Shakespeare's dramatization of an external Providence as it affects Henry VI's rule. This distinction allows for a different understanding of Quinn's terms, general and specific Providence, by identifying the specific approach to divine authority with the characters and the more questionable presence of general Providential patterns with the playwright.

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[41]Hall, 247. The n in affliccion and the m in kyngdom have been added to the quotation in place of the original symbol over the preceding o's.

dear?/ Let them obey that knows not how to rule;/ This hand was made to handle nought but gold" (2H6.V.i.5-7), "His attitude here does not strike us as being one of respect for the divine dignity of kingship so much as a virtual idolatry of power for its own sake."[42] York's focus is on the worldly rather than the divine.

Not only does Shakespeare avoid depicting Providence as a unifying principle centering on either Henry VI or the Yorkist contender, but at the same time he puts into the mouths of his other characters words that reveal divine sanction simply as an instrument of faction. Opposing political sides both appeal to Providence to justify their causes. One gets the sense that if any myth is propagated by Shakespeare's account of history, there are, as Henry Kelly suggests, at least three. In the civil war of the Henry VI plays the clash between the Yorkist and Lancastrian myths dominates. Clifford, supporting the English troops led by a Lancastrian king, says, "God on our side, doubt not of victory" (2H6.IV.viii.52). Edward, defending his Yorkist title to the throne, calls out, "God and Saint George for us!" (3H6.II.i.204). Hastings, a Yorkist supporter, appeals for divine assistance instead of military alliances, believing that "'Tis better using France than trusting France./ Let us be back'd with God, and with the seas,/ Which he hath giv'n" (3H6.IV.i. 42-44). Queen Margaret, the acting head of the Lancastrian forces, addresses her lords and knights with, "You fight in justice; then in God's name, lords,/ Be valiant, and give signal to the fight" (3H6.V.iv.81-82). Henry's nonpartisan appeal, "To whom God will, there be the victory!" (3H6.II.v.15), is virtually lost in the tumult. Convinced of the justness of its cause, each side asserts the privilege of divine sanction. The inconsistencies in the Providential interpretation of events become blatantly obvious in the series of battles in which inevitably some win and some lose, while all declare themselves to be right. Prince Edward's charge against Warwick becomes the universal complaint of disorder in the two plays: "If that be right which Warwick says is right,/ There is no wrong, but every thing is right" (3H6.II.ii.131-132). Rights can only exist if they are mutually acknowledged; in Henry's England, they are not.

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[42]H. Kelly, 259.

Personal motives and malice become so intertwined with appeals for Providential protection that the contradictions become even more apparent. Clifford's motivation as a Lancastrian advocate is personal revenge, divorced from any sense of divine justice. He declares, "King Henry, be thy title right or wrong,/ Lord Clifford vows to fight in thy defense./ May that ground gape, and swallow me alive,/ Where I shall kneel to him that slew my father!"(3I.i.159-162). For Clifford, Northumberland, and Westmoreland, the moral principles surrounding the title to the throne are irrelevant, and loyalty to Henry ends when he can no longer provide an outlet for their vengeful spirits. In the opposing faction, Warwick's response mirrors theirs as he abandons York for Lancaster after suing for Edward's queen in France. Warwick says, "Not that I pity Henry's misery,/ But seek revenge on Edward's mockery" (3H6.III.iii.264-265). Restored to the throne, Henry says to Warwick, "I thank God and thee./ He was the author, thou the instrument" (3H6.IV.vi.17-18). Yet shifting alliances and the manipulation of appeals to divine authority for private ends throughout the civil strife suggest that men and their factions have become the authors and kingmakers: God is reduced to an instrument. Personal considerations replace Providential reasons for loyalty.[43]

Richard of Gloucester blurs the distinction between Providential and personal views altogether when he says:

> I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown,
> And while I live, t'account this world but hell,
> Until my misshap'd trunk that bears this head
> Be round impaled with a glorious crown (3H6.III.ii.168-171).

For him, the absolute rightness of political claims gives way to private ambitions, and divine power is subsumed by his narrow, selfish vision. When Gloucester murders Henry VI, saying, "die, prophet, in thy speech:/ For this, amongst the rest, was I ordain'd" (3H6.V.vi.56-57), his words ring empty in the wake of all he has previously said and done. As Henry Kelly says, "Richard can hardly be taken to express God's predestining intentions.... His evil is his

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[43]The result is not as Brownlow suggests, that "Providence may punish, but it does so through men's own, consenting wills" (52), but that men inflict suffering on one another in the name of Providence.

own doing, not God's."[44] Allusions to God's operation in history are so disjointed and so intertwined with personal malice and private interests that divine justification soon loses significance as a unifying appeal.

In 1 Henry VI, Shakespeare complicates rather than clarifies the balance between divine and personal influences by including supernatural activities, and Joan's role in the wars between the French and the English is not entirely clear. She is a prophetic voice for the French, but whether her powers are perceived as deriving from good or evil sources depends largely on the political bias of either nation. Edward Berry notes the contemporary source of this ambiguity, saying, "Witches, after all, fulfilled a variety of functions in the Elizabethan scheme of things, sometimes serving as God's agents, more often Satan's; sometimes punishing sins, more often diabolically inciting them."[45] Shakespeare is perceptive enough to show the political value of such uncertainty for enemies justifying their actions. To the French, Joan is holy, and Alanson promises to "have [her] reverenc'd like a blessed saint" (1H6.III.iii.14-15). To the English, she is a witch, and Bedford taunts the new French ally, Burgundy, saying, "Despairing of his own arm's fortitude,/ To join with witches and the help of hell!" (1H6.II.i.17-18). Joan herself adds to the contradiction by speaking of a "vision sent to her from heaven" (1H6.I.ii.52), but then unsuccessfully conjuring fiends and admitting, "My ancient incantations are too weak,/ And hell too strong for me to buckle with" (1H6.V.iii.27-28). Opposing national views and the ironic discrepancy between Joan's words and actions prevent a simple, one-sided interpretation of her role.

Consequently, her claim, "Assign'd I am to be the English scourge" (1H6.I.ii.129), becomes doubtful. It assumes a divine source for her prophetic power, whereas the power of hell in opposition to the cause of godliness seems more likely. Furthermore, her supernatural influence as the English scourge is mentioned only once, while Talbot is referred to as a

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[44]H. Kelly, 275.

[45]Edward Berry, Patterns of Decay: Shakespeare's Early Histories (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975), 12-13.

French scourge three times not by himself but by both the English and the French.[46] The counterbalance implies that if Joan is inflicting divine punishment on England, Talbot is certainly doing the same for France. From this perspective, Tillyard's remark is somewhat simplistic and inaccurate:

> Joan, by God's permission and through the general collapse of order among the English nobility, has dealt England a great blow. Having dealt it, and ceasing to be God's tool, she loses her power. Her evil spirits desert her and she is captured and burnt for the wicked woman she is.[47]

Indeed, while Joan convinces Burgundy to change sides, witchcraft plays no part in the battles, and the English nobility collapses entirely without Joan's assistance. In one battle, a messenger observes, "Here had the conquest fully been seal'd up,/ If Sir John Falstaff had not play'd the coward"(1I.i.131). In another, Lucy proclaims, "The fraud of England, not the force of France,/ Hath now entrapp'd the noble-minded Talbot" (1H6.IV.iv.36-37). The English scourge acts like a witch, the French scourge is called a devil and portrayed as a military hero, both nations claim to receive power from heaven to send their opponents to hell, and dissension among the English ranks clearly weakens their own military capability. A single divine plan in history is obscured by partisan claims and irresponsible political choices.

The sorcery scene in 2 Henry VI, like Joan of Arc's role in 1 Henry VI, clouds the typical association of Providence with the revelation of future events. The Elizabethan perception of sorcery is explained in Kelly's description of prophecy:

> As far as theological doctrine is concerned, it was universally accepted by Christians in Shakespeare's day that only God had certain knowledge of the future, and that evil spirits could only conjecture future events from already existing causes. But we must no doubt admit that this doctrine was often contradicted in practice, and that men ascribed more knowledge to spirits than theologians could justify.[48]

Predictions come from evil as well as good sources. The witch in Act I.ii, invoking spirits and prophesying about events, appears as an evil presence giving lip service to "the eternal God." What makes the scene all the more ambiguous is the underlying implication that the

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[46]A.L. French, "Joan of Arc and Henry VI," English Studies 49 (1968): 427.

[47]Tillyard, 168.

[48]H. Kelly, 254.

Cardinal's men, who "Have hired [Hume] to undermine the Duchess,/ And buzz these conjurations in her brain" (2H6.I.ii.98-99), are the instigators of the whole plot. In this light, the prophecies are calculated and not revealed. Men and women, in conjunction with good and evil preternatural forces, appear to control the course of events.

In the immediate context of this scene, justice does prevail in a manner consistent with Henry VI's Providential interpretation: the conspirators meet untimely deaths as a result of their actions. But, in the larger picture, when fathers and sons begin killing one another and when the innocent suffer as Gloucester forewarned, the intervention of a supreme power implies injustice rather than the triumph of good. Shakespeare offers in the sorcery scene, as he does in his portrayal of Joan of Arc in the earlier strife, an unsettling combination of divine influences, the powers of the underworld, and the strategies of men; the combination obscures rather than defines a central, all-powerful source of authority.

The "heav'ns are just, and time suppresseth wrongs" (3H6.III.iii.77) as a commonly proclaimed slogan in the civil war is undermined not only by the ambiguous relationship between natural and supernatural causes, but by the way the characters acknowledge the presence of both Providence and Fortune. The association of the two intervening forces throughout history is both complicated and dynamic. Moody Prior suggests that "With Christianity, the idea of providence tended to absorb the idea of fortune, and the capriciousness of fortune was in this way made to seem understandable as part of a grand design not readily visible to man; but the two conceptions were never firmly fused."[49] With Machiavelli's influential rendition of fickle, controllable Fortune in the mid-sixteenth century, the fusion of the two ideas became less convincing. Attitudes continued to change in Shakespeare's era as Sanders notes:

> H.R. Patch has shown how at this period the medieval assimilation of Fortune to the providential activity of God was being reversed, while there was a revival of interest in the more cynical pagan goddess of antiquity - a malicious and irrational creature, who was perhaps... the friend of the bold, but certainly no fit ally of the Deity.[50]

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[49]Moody Prior, The Drama of Power: Studies in Shakespeare's History Plays (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 22.

[50]Sanders, 115. Sanders alludes to H.R. Patch, The Tradition of the Goddess

In Shakespeare's early histories, the views expressed by the two competing kings dramatize the ideological uncertainties about Providence and Fortune. Edward initially challenges the loss of his kingly title, declaring, "Though Fortune's malice overthrow my state,/ My mind exceeds the compass of her wheel" (3H6.IV.iii.46-47), but he then concedes, "What fates impose, that men must needs abide" (3H6.IV.iii.58-59). The influence of Fortune for Edward parallels the power of Providence for Henry. Yet, just as King Edward does not deny a divine presence, King Henry VI, a devout Christian, does not exclude the possibility of other outside forces. He says:

> Therefore that I may conquer fortune's spite
> By living low, where fortune cannot hurt me,
> And that the people of this blessed land
> May not be punish'd with my thwarting stars,
> Warwick, although my head still wear the crown,
> I here resign my government to thee,
> For thou art fortunate in all thy deeds (3H6.IV.vi.19-25).

Fortune's wheel, the fates, and "thwarting stars" appear incompatible with Providence not only to modern readers but, according to Patch, to a growing number of Shakespeare's contemporaries. The irrational nature of one force excludes the rational, ordering properties of the other. A beneficent God can hardly be an arbitrary one. Consequently, while Shakespeare's characters use divine authority as an instrument to justify their individual actions, they qualify their confidence in God's controlling plan by acknowledging Fortune's random role in history. Ironically but unsurprisingly, Fortune frequently receives the blame for political downfalls, while God is credited with political successes. The reality of subjective self-serving interpretations of events, more apparent than the actual intervention of external forces, exists as a potential cause of disunity and strife.

Trial by combat, another typical sign of Providential approval to justify or authorize one's cause, is questioned in 2 Henry VI. Sister Mary B. Mroz says of the medieval period in England that Shakespeare dramatizes:

> Though the combat was looked upon primarily as an appeal to God's judgment, after which punishment was meted out by lawful authority, death in trial by battle was interpreted as a direct execution of divine vengeance through the agency of the

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[30](cont'd) Fortuna in Medieval Philosophy and Literature (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927)

opponent.[51]

King Henry, with his faith in Providence, arranges a combat to settle the difference between an armourer and his man. At Peter's victory, the King commands, "Go, take hence that traitor from our sight,/ For by his death we do perceive his guilt,/ And God in justice hath reveal'd to us/ The truth and innocence of this poor fellow" (2H6.II.iii.100-103). But Shakespeare portrays the combat as little more than a farce, and it is difficult to join Henry in interpreting the apprentice's victory as a sincere affirmation of Providential control. The armourer confirms his guilt by confessing his treason, but York's sarcastic statement to Peter, "Fellow, thank God, and the good wine in thy master's way" (2H6.II.iii.95-96), exposes Henry's narrow, idealistic perspective. Furthermore, the combat scene follows shortly after the scene of the false miracle, and as H.M. Richmond says, "How can single combat be safely left to Providence if blatant fraud and blasphemy thus flourish without divine response?"[52]

Appeals for divine response seem to pervade the characters' habits rather than their convictions, as becomes apparent in the pattern of oath-taking and oath-breaking, of swearing and forswearing, that is symptomatic of a lack of authority and control. In Shakespeare's period, oaths are "always sworn directly to God, no matter for whose benefit,"[53] and their validity derives from a shared faith in the presence of a supreme being. The sanctity of the oath unites society, for "by lawful othes, malefactors are searched out, wrongdoers are punished, and thei whiche sustein wrong, are restored to their right.... Every Christian mannes worde... should be so true, that it should be regarded as an oth"[54] King

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[51] Sister Mary Bonaventure Mroz, Divine Vengeance: A Study in the Philosophical Backgrounds of the Revenge Motif as it Appears in Shakespeare's Chronicle History Plays (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1941), 40.

[52] H.M. Richmond, Shakespeare's Political Plays (New York: Random House, 1967), 44.

[53] H. Kelly, 264.

[54] Faye Kelly, "Oaths in Shakespeare's Henry VI Plays," Shakespeare Quarterly 24 (1972): 358. Kelly quotes from Certayne Sermons, or Homilies (London, 1547), Sig L3, M1.

Henry VI asserts the solemnity and the binding power of oaths when he responds to Margaret's plea in Suffolk's defense with, "Had I but said, I would have kept my word;/ But when I swear, it is irrevocable" (2H6.III.ii.293-294). As a subject, Exeter appeals to the same authority when he says to the nobles embarking to France, "Remember, lords, your oaths to Henry sworn:/ Either to quell the Dolphin utterly,/ Or bring him in obedience to your yoke" (1H6.I.i.162-164). As national and international conflicts escalate, however, oaths - particularly the holy oaths of allegiance to the king - are dishonored so frequently that they become not simply worthless words, but dangerously deceptive signs of loyalty. In 1 Henry VI, Burgundy affirms Talbot's oath, "I swear to get the town, or die" (1H6.III.ii.84), with his own, "My vows are equal partners with thy vows" (1H6.III.ii.85). The partnership breaks, however, with Burgundy's defection to the French, which becomes a major cause of England's next defeat. Somerset promises York military aid and then declares, "I owe him little duty, and less love,/ And take foul scorn to fawn on him by sending" (1H6.IV.iv.34-35). Denied the needed forces, Talbot faces a fatal defeat at the hands of the French. Dishonored oaths and broken promises breed disunity and strife at home and hinder military activities abroad.

The pattern is similar in the two plays that concentrate on England's civil wars. When York declares his duty to honor Henry's kingship, saying, "I took an oath that he should quietly reign" (3H6.I.ii.15), Edward challenges him with, "But for a kingdom any oath may be broken:/ I would break a thousand oaths to reign one year" (3H6.I.ii.16-17). Political ambition annuls the political pledge. Edward's persuasion on one side and Margaret's aggression on the other cancel the pact between the two competing kings, and a series of betrayals follows. Salisbury answers Henry's question, "Hast thou not sworn allegiance unto me?" (2H6.V.i.179), with, "It is great sin to swear unto a sin,/ But greater sin to keep a sinful oath" (2H6.V.i.182-183). Pledges become conditional rather than absolute. Warwick not only violates his oath of allegiance, but ignores the contradiction in swearing a new one to disclaim the old, saying, "King Lewis, I here protest in sight of heaven/... That I am clear from this misdeed of Edward's;/ No more my king, for he

dishonors me" (3H6.III.iii.181-184). The French king himself justifies his decisions by implying that his oath to one ruler is no longer binding when Providence places another king on the throne. But the quick reversals of both men when they learn of Edward's marriage "[do] not speak well for their integrity as spokesmen for the right"[55] They violate the bond between word and truth. The solemnity of the oath as a sign of rightness, in fact, deteriorates to little more than a subject of mockery, as Richard ridicules Clifford, "What, not an oath? Nay, then the world goes hard/ When Clifford cannot spare his friends an oath" (3H6.II.vi.77-78). Henry's dismal remark to the two keepers is a comment on the attitudes of his many subjects and allies: "Ah, simple men, you know not what you swear!/ Look, as I blow this feather from my face,/ And as the air blows it to me again,/... Such is the lightness of you common men" (3H6.III.i.83-89).

In the political commonwealth of the sixteenth century and earlier, an invocation to God was a verbal indication of loyalty, a confirmation of authority, and a gesture of faith and trust. Sir Thomas Elyot, in The Governor, says:

> Since faith is the foundation of justice, which is the chief constitutor and maker of a public weal... I may therefore conclude that faith is both the original and (as it were) principal constitutor and conservator of the public weal.[56]

In the Henry VI plays, the constant abuse and violation of oaths represents one breech of faith after another. In the chaos of deceit, Henry cries out, "O, where is faith? O, where is loyalty?"(2H6.V.i.166). In 3 Henry VI, when Queen Elizabeth cautions Rivers, "For trust not him that hath once broken faith" (3H6.IV.iv.30), her words encapsulate an underlying cause of the lack of authority throughout Henry's reign, a cause manifested in Alanson's political advice: "take this compact of a truce,/ Although you break it when your pleasure serves" (1H6.V.iv.163-164). Without mutual faith and trust there is no confidence and stability. Inconstant men and women, by manipulating the oath, the appeal to God, divest it of its sacredness, allowing the all-powerful and divine to become tools of division rather than a common source of reverence and respect. The result, as Faye Kelly appropriately observes,

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[55] H. Kelly, 271.

[56] Thomas Elyot, The Governor, quoted in Edward Berry, Patterns of Decay: Shakespeare's Early Histories (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975), 49.

is that "the frame of disorder [is] real, not because a vindictive God has punished evildoers but because men would not honor their word." [57]

The vindictiveness of God becomes a more common theme in Richard III where curses are more pervasive than oaths. Harsh petitions to a wrathful God set a different tone for the final play than for the rest of the tetralogy. In the Henry VI plays, particularly 2 Henry VI, while prophecies are proclaimed and fulfilled with reasonable accuracy, the spiteful spirit of the curse does not dominate the pattern. If Eleanor's hatred of Margaret inspires her to warn Henry, "She'll hamper thee, and dandle thee like a baby" (2H6.I.iii.145), Gloucester's concern for the state leads him to say about the Cardinal's plot against his own life, "But mine is made the prologue to their play;/ For thousands more, that yet suspect no peril,/ Will not conclude their plotted tragedy" (2H6.III.i.151-153). If York's ambition invokes a prophecy about the deaths of Beaufort, Suffolk, Buckingham, and Somerset, King Henry's prediciton that Richmond "will prove [his] country's bliss./ His looks are full of peaceful majesty,/ His head by nature fram'd to wear a crown" (3H6.IV.vi.70-72), typically exemplifies his own pacifist nature. Indeed, Shakespeare's histories are more appealing as political drama than convincing as an affirmation of a particular political stance, because the prophecies given are as much a comment on the characters as on the unfolding of events, while Fortune, sorcery, and farcical combats qualify a simple understanding of Providential destiny. In Richard III, however, there is little concern with Fortune and thwarting stars, there are no practicing witches, and hatred is such a prevailing sentiment that prophecies take the form of curses, Margaret being the chief curser of them all.

That her curses are fulfilled with even more deadly precision than the prophecies in Henry VI, where, for instance, Gloucester's dream about the Cardinal's men is countered by Eleanor's fanciful vision about becoming queen, leads one to the assumption that Margaret is simply the voice of God as He unfolds His plan of retribution and restoration for England. Sanders, however, offers a different interpretation, suggesting that there are two distinct concepts of Margaret's dramatic function:

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[57]F. Kelly, 366.

> one, as the specially sanctioned spokesman for wronged humanity, employing deliberately stylised diction to indicate her ideal function; the other, as a particular sick woman vomiting up her corruption - a demented prophetess in the grip of an eternal rancour which has eaten out the heart of her humanity.[58]

His focus on a dualistic dramatic function is less satisfying than an interpretation considering the integrated though complex nature of human character: Margaret is not playing two roles, but is one woman mourning the loss of her family and power while bitterly cursing and blaming the world for her dispossession. Sanders is correct, however, to observe the difficulty in reconciling Margaret's vicious character with a divine role. Her prayers are cruel:

> O upright, just, and true disposing God,
> How do I thank thee that this carnal cur
> Preys on the issue of his mother's body,
> And makes her pew-fellow with others' moan(R3.IV.iv.55-58).

As Prior observes, "Margaret does not pray for justice but for revenge with interest."[59] Her character, as a "neurotic prophetess" vomiting hatred on everyone, is so much like Richard's, as a "bloody manslayer" destroying others to become king,[60] that their confrontations raise a question about good working to destroy evil. Is God's will simply above the repulsiveness of His human agents as His justice triumphs in spite of them, or is Providence working through a careful pattern of crime and punishment in which Margaret's curses are, as Tillyard claims, simply part of a tit-for-tat scheme?[61]

Tit for tat, however, provides no explanation for the suffering of the innocent victims. Margaret, in fact, does not distinguish between the innocent and the guilty and even curses Buckingham as as an afterthought because he doubts her. But Shakespeare appeals to the sympathies of his audience by dramatizing the plight of innocent characters, especially the children in Richard III. In one scene, the prince is figured as a promising young man, clever enough to engage in a battle of wits with his uncle but powerless against Richard's murderous

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[58]Sanders, 101.

[59]Prior, 50.

[60]Chris Hassel, Songs of Death: Performance, Interpretation, and the Text of 'Richard III' (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 115-116.

[61]Tillyard, 212.

schemes. In another scene, Clarence's children question and mourn their father's murder. Similarly, earlier in 3 Henry VI, Rutland appears as a helpless child murdered by Clifford against the tutor's plea, "murther not this innocent child,/ Lest thou be hated both of God and man" (3H6.I.iii.8-9). The children are obvious victims: Moody Prior observes, "The providential historians pointed to the fate of the children as evidence of God's justice in retribution for the sins of their parents; in Richard III their plight speaks out against the inhumanity which surrounds them."[62]

Although Fortune does not enter into the characters' rationalizations in the last play, divine justice itself appears more arbitrary than just. While the innocent suffer, some guilty do not. The unsavoury Edward IV, for instance, a breaker of oaths and plotter of murders, escapes the series of vengeful attacks and counterattacks to die a natural death, ironically fearing judgment for Clarence's death, an act that was not his at all. As A.L. French says, "if Justice reigns in these plays, if the mills of God grind slow but grind exceeding fine, then that Justice - and that God - are incomprehensible to human minds."[63] A Tudor proponent claims a straightforward scheme of retribution and restoration; Shakespeare exposes a more complicated reality. An official Tudor interpretation of history focuses on the outcome of events for England; Shakespeare illustrates the consequences of history for its individual actors with their Providential beliefs.

Indeed, while Shakespeare accepts and relies on the assumptions of a Christian world, he explores the complexity of man's relationship with God, particularly in the dialogue between Clarence and his murderers. The men debate about the legitimate exercise of authority in which divine and human appeals conflict. Clarence indicates that by sending an innocent man to heaven, the murderers disobey the eternal King of Kings. He condemns himself by his own logic, however, as the murderer indicates by asking, "How canst thou urge God's dreadful law to us,/ When thou hast broke it in such dear degree?"(R3.I.iv.209-210). The scene dramatizes the intellectual and human difficulties apparent in a view of God's

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[62]Prior, 53.

[63]A.L. French, "The Mills of God and Shakespeare's Early History Plays," English Studies 55 (1974): 323.

retributive justice and in the conflict between human and divine authority.

> Clarence is asserting his right to live when he has no right to live; the Murderers their right to kill, which is no right. Between these two passionate self-interests the issues of allegiance and justice are tossed and jostled back and forth, every rationalisation being undercut by the next.[64]

The guilt-ridden murderer who leaves, saying, "How fain, like Pilate, would I wash my hands/ Of this most grievous murther!"(R3.I.iv.272-273), incites one to consider the question of man's primary responsibility when human and divine claims do not coincide. Following Margaret's catalogue of curses, this scene of philosophical debate becomes a means by which to measure rather than simply accept the proclaimers of God's justice and the interpreters of divine sanction throughout the play.

Elizabeth's interpretation of God, for example, is quite different from Margaret's. To Elizabeth, who says, "So just is God, to right the innocent"(R3.I.iii.181), a divine presence is more merciful than vindictive. But she does not perceive God's power as being all-pervasive. When she prays for her children's protection, she addresses the Tower not God, saying, "Pity, you ancient stones, those tender babes/ Whom envy hath immur'd within your walls"(R3.IV.i.98-99). When the princes are murdered, she questions Providential control, asking, "Wilt thou, O God, fly from such gentle lambs,/... When didst thou sleep when such a deed was done?"(R3.IV.iv.22-24). When Margaret teaches her to curse, Elizabeth doubts the power of her own words, responding, "though what they will impart/ Help nothing else, yet do they ease the heart"(R3.IV.iv.130-131). Finally, when Richard seeks her daughter's hand in marriage, Elizabeth challenges the idea of divine determinism by inverting Richard's appeal to unavoidable destiny into the "avoided grace [that] makes destiny"(R3.IV.iv.219): Richard himself. He initiates the marriages and causes the murders. Elizabeth's sceptism, countering Margaret's unquestioning belief in the violent supernatural control of events, adds a strength of ambiguity that gives to Richard III what Hassel refers to as a dialectic strategy.[65] In the Henry VI plays, the problem with divine authority arises largely from opposing appeals to the same source; in Richard III, Shakespeare examines the

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[64]Sanders, 78.

[65]Hassel, 107.

complexity inherent in the divine assumptions themselves, given the limits of human comprehension and the variance in human interpretation. Guilt and innocence, justice and mercy, good and evil are broad philosophical concepts that potentially make a political ideology of Providential control an inadequate explanation for the individuals who participate in the events of history.

The assumptions of the Tudor Myth, however, do provide a framework for the resolution in the battle between Richard and Richmond at the end of the play. In the double dream sequence with the ghosts, the dichotomy between good and evil is quite plain: Richmond will be blessed as a promised leader; Richard will be cursed as a murderous usurper. Richard's struggle with his conscience only reinforces this view, for as Robert Reed explains, "among the Elizabethans the conscience was thought to be structured by God."[46] In the language of the two rivals, the distinction between right and wrong is also clearly portrayed. Richmond acknowledges God as his source of strength, saying, "Then in God's name march!/... Kings it makes gods, and meaner creatures kings"(R3.V.ii.22-24). A few lines later, Richard declares that his power lies within himself: "the King's name is a tower of strength,/ Which they upon the adverse faction want" (R3.V.iii.12-13). Even the opponents' appeals to the patron saint differ. Richmond addresses his heavenly sovereign: "God and Saint George! Richmond and victory!"(R3.V.iii.270); Richard calls forth the violence of hideous monsters: "Our ancient word of courage, fair Saint George,/ Inspire us with the spleen of fiery dragons!/ Upon them! Victory sits on our helms"(R3.V.iii.349-51). Unlike in earlier battle scenes, God's presence clearly favors one side over the other. Richard's final words, "A horse, a horse! my kingdom for a horse!"(RV.iv.13) announce the desperation of a determined but already defeated man, while Richmond's first words of gratitude to God in victory, his promise of harmony in marriage and prosperity in peace, assure the longed-for conclusion to Richard's tyrannous reign. The Tudors are triumphant; the myth is upheld.

The problem arises in reconciling this resolution with the rest of the play and with the tetralogy as a whole. Henry VI's prophecy in favor of Richmond provides a link between the

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[46]Robert R. Reed, Crime and God's Judgment in Shakespeare (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 119.

last two plays, but in Richard III, Richmond's part is concentrated in the final three scenes, and he receives no mention at all until midway through Act IV. As the hero of a sustaining political myth, he plays a small part. Within any of the Henry VI plays his limited role would be less noticeable, for there so many figures populate the stage intermittently that a character such as Talbot need not dominate to be heroic. In the last play, however, Richard III is such a monster of control and center of action that Richmond's final victory fails to achieve heroic dimensions. Hassel, considering the Tudor king from another perspective, believes that because Shakespeare's Richmond is less ambiguous than the character portrayed in the sources, "Richmond's victory over Richard can be affirmed aesthetically as well as morally."[67] The aesthetic appeal of the rest of the play, however, comes not from simplicity and purity, but from the ambiguity and dialectical conflict of characters' attitudes. Until the final battle, Shakespeare devotes much of his dramatic energy to questioning the harmony of God's justice and man's, to exposing rather than rationalizing human suffering, to revealing a varied rather than uniform view of God's role in history. Thus, if Richmond triumphs as the country's redeemer, by the standard set by Clarence's murder scene where redemption belongs to the soul, Richmond is only a pseudo-redeemer.[68]

The larger the perspective, the less convincing is Richmond's role. As John Wilders says, "In a series of plays where God's name is played so irresponsibly, it is difficult to be wholly convinced by Richmond's claim to be the instrument of divine justice."[69] When Henry's piety does not lead to political success, when Margaret's judgments do not portray a merciful God, when factions claim the same divine source, the unity of Providence and politics in Richard III, Act V, cannot be a culmination of a series centered on divine ordination.

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[67]Hassel, 45.

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[68]Brownlow, 77.

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[69]John Wilders, The Lost Garden: A View of Shakespeare's English and Roman History Plays (London: Macmillan, 1978), 57.

A difficulty then arises in explaining Shakespeare's conclusion. If he did not intend to write a set of history plays organized around an official Tudor doctrine, as some critics claim he did, then perhaps the conformity of the conclusion and the events leading to it becomes less significant. Indeed, given the contradictions and inconsistencies in the Providential interpretations throughout the play and the tetralogy, it is unfair and even inaccurate to impose the sentiments of the ending back onto the rest of the drama.[70] From an historic standpoint, one may explain Shakespeare's conclusion by noting that while he demonstrates creative flexibility in his use of the chronicle sources, he does not alter the main developments in which Richmond's victory over Richard plays an important part. From a political standpoint, it may be that Shakespeare adopted a largely traditional approach to Act V to avoid offending his own monarch, the granddaughter of Henry VII, who upheld the Providential view of her heritage. What seems particularly significant, however, in terms of Shakespeare's political dramatization in the first tetralogy is that by Richard III he has become more interested in the uses and effects of illegitimate power than in activities focusing on the legitimate realm of authority deriving strength from such mutual assumptions as the existence and intervention of God. From this angle, the path to Richard's defeat becomes much more significant than Richmond's victory, and Richard III merits discussion from a different perspective on political relationships.[71]

Yet by illustrating appeals to divine authority for political activity in the whole tetralogy, Shakespeare reveals the complex relationship between individual personalities and common ideologies - a relationship that resists that dichotomous approach to character and Providence taken by many critics and that produces the dynamic dimension of politics, the

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[70] The same can be said of Shakespeare's later tragedy, Macbeth, in which the restoration of peace with the death of the usurper in the last act appears as a rather tidy, conventional resolution to the terror of guilt and the equivoction of evil portrayed in Macbeth's struggles leading to his end. Shakespeare typically explores questions of existence and exposes problems in human experience which evade simple, straightforward answers. Thus, it is not surprising that the conclusions to his dramatic action do not necessarily confront or resolve his thematic ambiguities, and if the endings are less satisfying than the preceding drama, perhaps the final action and dialogue should not be given the same or greater consideration.

[71] See final chapter: "Will, Persuasion, Force, and Fear."

dramatic dimension of history. The ideological belief in God's intervening role in human events becomes for many of Shakespeare's characters an instrument by which to proclaim their rights in opposition to similar claims. Their actions dramatize a debate of rightness: individual interpretations qualify basic universal assumptions, and conflicting interpretations explain the breakdown in authority. At the same time, chaos arises from contradictions within Providential beliefs; chaos arises from the ambiguities created by the flux and change of history which produces the conflict and evolution of ideologies. The Tudor Myth offers a single, simple view of God's role in history limited to a particular time frame; Shakespeare's portrayal of the ironic discrepancies between characters' actions and words and of the meaning in broad philosophical concepts for opposing individuals, while it does not completely contradict the mythical doctrine, is a much broader, more credible, persuasive articulation of history.

III. Familial Authority: Inheritance, Succession, and Inversion

In Shakespeare's histories, the family, according to Robert Pierce, "functions almost entirely as a commentary on the causes and consequences of political disorder."[1] Marriage and family relationships "give an immediacy to Shakespeare's panoramic view of the rise and fall of kings and kingdoms."[2] Similarly, Herbert Lindenberger suggests that the family serves as a model for historical drama.[3] The typical critical approach is to see family and state as separate realms reflecting upon one another. Shakespeare depicts family, however, as more than a commentary on or replica of public activity, for the authority or mutual respect deriving from patriarchal values is inextricably tied to the political system. While divine authority invokes an external, omnipotent power, familial authority as a source of social order gains its strength from the deep-rooted acceptance of blood ties linking the past, present, and future in a predictable pattern of inheritance and succession.

In the first tetralogy, however, family loyalties are at the heart of public discord, and the political problem, as Shakespeare dramatizes it, arises not from a rejection of public authority but from the ideological contradictions inherent in a dependence on family bonds for communal standards. For although inheritance is an accepted principle, the values or properties to be inherited are not mutually acknowledged. While succession is considered a valid right, the line of succession for the Yorkists and Lancastrians is a subject of contention. Although the family is a social unit, its capacity to extend or limit membership confuses its role as a standard of stability. Thus, a network of loyalties develops into a knot of uncertainties, and family functions as a source of division rather than cohesion, promoting war rather than peace.

Just as divine right lies at the center of historical Providential values, succession is the primary political issue deriving from appeals to familial authority, and Shakespeare, by

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[1]Robert Pierce, Shakespeare's History Plays: The Family and the State (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1971), 36.

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[2]Pierce, 242.

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[3]Herbert Lindenberger, Historical Drama: A Relation of Literature and Reality (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 156.

establishing the legitimacy of both competing claims, demonstrates the complexity of hereditary rights during the fifteenth century. The situation in which Henry VI and York are official contenders is highly ambiguous as Larry Champion explains: "Henry does wear the crown, and he does avow unswerving allegiance to God. Yet York's claim to the throne is at least as valid as his."[4] Henry Kelly disagrees, believing that "Objectively speaking, it would seem that Shakespeare presents the Yorkist title to the throne as having greater validity than that of Lancaster, in spite of the upright Henry's present convictions to the contrary."[5] In drama, however, there is little to determine objectivity beyond the subjective remarks of the characters, and Henry's convictions simply balance with York's, while both men contradict themselves in their public acclamations. York, who gains encouragement from Mortimer's detailed account of their shared ancestry, proclaims his legitimate right to the throne based on a genealogical succession beginning with "Lionel Duke of Clarence,/ Third son to the third Edward, King of England" (1H6.II.iv.83-84). Henry's hereditary defense has a more recent orientation, for he says, "I am the son of Henry the Fift" (3H6.I.i.107), and "Think'st thou that I will leave my kingly throne,/ Wherein my grandsire and my father sat?" (3H6.I.i.124-125). The argument arises not because one heritage is more correct than the other, but because there is no mutual agreement about the temporal extension or limitation of family boundaries. Indeed, both men have roots in the same family of Edward III, but the question for them is whether York's claim is more valid because it extends deeper into the past or whether Henry's is binding because it is more current.

The throne-seekers and their allies expose the uncertainties of rightness without clarifying the solution. Warwick, York's supporter, shows the weakness of Henry's claim by saying, "you tell a pedigree/ Of threescore and two years - a silly time/ To make prescription for a kingdom's worth" (3H6.III.iii.92-94). Clifford, on the Lancastrian side, challenges Warwick's argument with, "Who should succeed the father but the son?" (3.H6.II.ii.94). Henry himself becomes disoriented to the point of admitting, "I know not what to say, my

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[4]Champion, Perspective in Shakespeare's English Histories,36.

[5]H. Kelly, 271.

title's weak - " (3H6.I.i.134). York, however, condemns his own campaign against the de facto ruler when he challenges Henry VI's heritage by saying of Henry IV's rise to the throne, "'Twas by rebellion against his king" (3H6.I.i.133). By his own argument, York, a subject, has no right to displace Henry VI, a king.[4] There is no clear title to the throne, because the temporal boundaries of family are not defined, and the opponents' standards of legitimacy do not coincide. To King Henry's "I am thy sovereign," York responds, "I am thine" (3H6.I.i.76), and it remains for surrounding members of the state to choose and change sides or to create their own.

Given the ambiguities about hereditary rights, the throne is effectively vacant; power-seekers multiply; crowns and kings abound. Gloucester is one of the few characters who manifest unconditional obedience to the reigning king, Henry VI, but his actions and motives are deliberately misconstrued, and Suffolk says of him, "Resign [thy place] then and leave thine insolence./ Since thou wert king - as who is king but thou? -/ The commonwealth hath daily run to wrack" (2H6.I.iii.122-124). Of Queen Margaret, battling to regain her son's right to the throne, Edward says, "You that are king, though he do wear the crown,/ Have caus'd him, by new act of parliament,/ To blot out me, and put his own son in" (3H6.II.ii.90-92). Suffolk asserts his own kingly influence over Henry VI by saying to York, "Why, our authority is his consent,/ And what we do establish he confirms" (2H6.III.i.316-317). Cade parodies the political hierarchy, claiming, "For I am rightful heir unto the crown" (2H6.IV.ii.131). Warwick, the ever-shifting supporter, is labelled the setter-up and puller-down of kings (3H6.III.iii.157). In Act I of 3 Henry VI, York parodies Henry VI's ceremonial entrance in Act I of 2 Henry VI by coming in and sitting on Henry's throne. Later, York is ridiculed as he is adorned with a paper crown at the molehill scene of his own murder. Edward, inheriting his father's struggle for the throne, is crowned, uncrowned, and crowned again, while Richard devises his own plot to "pluck the crown from

[4]Henry Kelly points out that Henry's statement about his weak title is the first such Lancastrian admission in historical treatments of the time and that it indicates Shakespeare's inclination to favor the Yorkists' claim as royal heirs (Kelly, 262). But when Henry's remark is offset by York's unacknowledged contradiction, neither side appears to have a more legitimate title than the other.

feeble Henry's head" (2H6.V.i.2), "to command, to check, to o'erbear such/ As are of better person than [himself]" (3H6.III.ii.166-167). There is no political center; there is no unity without a recognized hierarchical order. In the words of John Blanpied, "Dukedoms and kingdoms are mouthed till they have become bare objects, props, like paper crowns - infinitely interchangeable because fundamentally meaningless."[7] The lack of a common standard for kingly rights leaves kingship open for manipulation.

The political chaos, while it focuses on this competition for the monarch's position, has its roots in the broader familial issue of inheritance based on the patriarchal importance of the relationship between fathers and sons. Intertwined with conflicting theories about legitimate inheritors of the kingdom is a debate about the values or qualities inherited from parents and the past, and about how a pattern of inheritance translates into rights for the present. A Providential perspective upholds the view that children are the inheritors of guilt. According to Somerset, whose red rose is a symbol of antagonism against the white rose of York, Plantagenet is the heir of such a heritage:

> Was not thy father, Richard Earl of Cambridge,
> For treason executed in our late king's days?
> And by his treason, stand'st not thou attainted,
> Corrupted, and exempt from ancient gentry?
> His trespass yet lives guilty in thy blood,
> And till thou be restor'd, thou art a yeoman (1H6.II.iv.90-95).

According to King Henry, however, Richard does deserve to be "restor'd to his blood" (1H6.III.i.158) so that the inheritance of property and title replaces a legacy of guilt. Clifford's more extreme interpretation of the inheritance principle allows for no mercy or reversals and denies not material rights but life. To Rutland's "I never did thee harm; why wilt thou slay me?" (3H6.I.iii.38), Clifford responds, "Thy father slew my father; therefore die" (3H6.I.iii.46). Responsibility for the wrongs of one's ancestors makes birthright for some a heavy burden to bear, and as Ronald Berman observes, "the association... between rights (and guilt) of kindred, and civil war, indicates that the spiritual chaos of rebellion is not confined to a particular moment of time, but rather that it descends in blood, and affects

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[7]John Blanpied, Time and the Artist in Shakespeare's English Histories (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1983), 69.

the lives of the entire nation."[8]

What Berman does not comment on is the extent of history involved in this issue of inheritance. For critics stressing a broad Providential pattern for the whole tetralogy, guilt is tied to the distant past and the murder of Richard II, but for Shakespeare's characters the inheritance appears to be limited to consecutive generations: York suffers for his father's wrongs and Rutland for his father's. While guilt is founded in religious thought, opponents in the plays consider it more as a familial matter than a Providential one. But even when family is the focus, there is no consistent view of the past: blame is perceived as an immediate legacy, while claims to rightness derive from various generations. The lack of a common temporal referent weakens the assumption that blood ties can serve as a legitimating political appeal.

Furthermore, guilt is only one of many inheritances considered as a bond between fathers and sons. At the opposite end of the spectrum from Clifford are characters who believe in a heritage of a chivalric conduct. Family honor is the source of right for Talbot, a man with feudal ideals of nobility, who tutors his son "in stratagems of war,/ That Talbot's name might be in [him] reviv'd" (1H6.IV.v.2-3). John Talbot can claim his name as an emblem of honor only by acting like his father as a courageous and committed warrior. An inheritance of chivalry is problematic as a source of familial authority, however. For the individual citizens, it is as destructive as a concept of inherited guilt in the course of crime and punishment. To be his father's true son, John can only "beg mortality,/ Rather than life preserv'd with infamy" (1H6.IV.v.32-33); to be his son's noble father, Talbot can only respond, "Come, side by side, together live and die" (1H6.IV.v.54). They expend their energy in a glory that is potentially self-defeating. For the nation, Talbot's concept of nobility must inevitably lead "to anarchy because the notions of 'honour' that regulate the heroic life can never be realized within any stable, historical form of national life."[9] Authority

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[8]Ronald Berman, "Fathers and Sons in the Henry VI Plays," Shakespeare Quarterly 13 (1962): 488.

[9]David Riggs, Shakespeare's Heroical Histories (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 99.

should ensure a stability that a relationship of honor and respect based on military conduct cannot provide.[10]

Inherited chivalry is also subject to the inconsistencies that arise when the link between one generation and the next is a theory of conduct rather than titles or material properties. Talbot does not provide a perfect example for his son. While the father refuses to do battle with the French except by the rules of warfare in open field and while, as a prisoner, he contemptuously declines to be ransomed for a "baser man of arms by far" (1H6.I.iv.30), yet he describes the time when he broke "from the officers that led [him],/ And with [his] nails digg'd stones out of the ground/ To hurl at the beholders of [his] shame" (1H6.I.iv.44-46). There is a similarity between his account and the assault the mayor describes between Gloucester's and Winchester's men, who,

> Forbidden late to carry any weapon,
> Have fill'd their pockets full of pebble stones,
> And, banding themselves in contrary parts,
> Do pelt so fast at one another's pate
> That many have their giddy brains knock'd out" (1H6.III.i.79-83).

The association of the two scenes diminishes the dignity of Talbot's behaviour and weakens his otherwise laudable reputation as the father of knightly conduct. The model and the theory are not entirely consistent. On the other hand, John, the receiver of the code, does not develop the same understanding of noble warfare as his father. When Talbot meets Joan, he battles with her, declaring, "Devil or dam, I'll conjure thee./ Blood will I draw on thee - thou art a witch - / And straightway give thy soul to him thou serv'st" (1H6.I.v.5-7). When John encounters Joan in the field, he scorns her "as unworthy fight" (1H6.IV.vii.43). An inheritance of chivalry, as Shakespeare portrays it, fails as a means of social unity, because ideals are not only transmitted but individually interpreted, and because knightly characters are capable of unknightly actions.

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[10]Critics tend to discuss the Talbot scenes in terms of the ineffectiveness of chivalric behaviour against the unchivalric tactics that became common during the Hundred Years' War. See David Riggs, Shakespeare's Heroic Histories, 99, and Norman Rabkin, Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning, 86-87. Just as significant, however, is Shakespeare's dramatization of the contradictions inherent in the chivaric code, for if it legitimates public action, it also guarantees an inheritance without a future for sons who ought to be the preservers of the nation.

Kingly characters are also capable of unkingly behaviour, for which reason Henry VI must derive much of his respect as a ruler not from a display of his own leadership qualities, but from the popularity of his father, Henry V. Henry VI's support is based on a belief in moral inheritance, which has broader implications than Talbot's preoccupation with military honor but which is similar in its assumption that men inherit an inclination to virtue or vice. Because virtue is understood to be inherent in royal blood, succession is expected to guarantee noble, legitimate rulers. Implying that as the son of a king Henry VI deserves obedience, Clifford manages to suppress the Cade rebellion by invoking Henry V's image and saying to the crowd of the King and his predecessor, "Who hateth him and honors not his father,/ Henry the Fift, that made all France to quake,/ Shake he his weapon at us and pass by" (2H6.IV.viii.16-18). Few, in fact, dispute Henry V's achievement, but Warwick questions the theory of inheritance by asking Oxford, "how haps it in this smooth discourse/ You told not how Henry the Sixt hath lost/ All that which Henry the Fift had gotten?" (3H6.III.iii.88-90). Indeed, by developing his own morality based on piety rather than on his father's nobility, Henry VI simultaneously refutes the idea of inherited conduct and, by submitting to the demands of foreign powers, loses the inheritance of territories obtained by his father. Henry VI shares with his predecessor only his name and the crown.

The King's moral and political values are tied in such a way that Suffolk is wrong to declare:

> For Henry, son unto a conqueror,
> Is likely to beget more conquerors,
> If with a lady of so high resolve
> (As is fair Margaret) he be link'd in love (1H6.V.v.73-76).

Prince Edward's valor later does inspire Oxford's remark, "thy famous grandfather/ Doth live again in thee" (3H6.V.iv.52-53), but either the prince inherits his virtues entirely from his mother, an unlikely viewpoint in a patriarchal society, or moral inheritance becomes a highly ambiguous concept not binding generations in a seamless family heritage, but noting commendable qualities if and when they appear through the line of succession. When inheritance is thus unpredictable, it provides an unsatisfactory justification for political rights and offers an unreliable means for ensuring dependable public leadership.

Nevertheless, the nobles surrounding the throne also appeal to ethical principles inconsistent with their behaviour. Salisbury relies on the language of birthright when he calls Warwick "my valiant son" (2H6.I.i.115), and Warwick reciprocates by using the family crest as a sign of his valor, saying, "Now, by my father's badge, old Nevil's crest,/ The rampant bear chain'd to the ragged staff,/ This day I'll wear aloft my burgonet" (2H6.V.i.202-204). For Warwick, however, the concept of inherited virtue fades as he degenerates from a noble son into an impulsive kingmaker who shows no moral qualms about shifting his allegiance from one ruler to another. Similarly, Buckingham only feigns a moral appeal when he pronounces Richard's greatness to the mayor. Recounting his speech to Richard, Buckingham says:

> Withal I did infer your lineaments,
> Being the right idea of your father,
> Both in your form and nobleness of mind;
> Laid open all your victories in Scotland,
> Your discipline in war, wisdom in peace,
> Your bounty, virtue, fair humility (R3.III.vii.12-17).

Richard adopts a public morality only to conceal private ambitions, and his family crest, like Warwick's, loses its intended significance. Gloucester's emblem of the boar represents not noble birth but vicious, immoral conduct. There is little evidence of a tradition of family virtue.

In fact, the contest between moral and ambitious action obscures the issue of inheritance. Coppelia Kahn describes the problem from a Freudian viewpoint by applying two possible meanings of the word emulation to the relationship between fathers and sons: the one meaning, in which the son carries out what the father began, shades into the other, a rivalry for honors and power.[11] In Shakespeare's early histories, however, there is little evidence that sons compete with their fathers. Even Gloucester, who eventually seeks to wear the crown, respects the decisions and commands of York. But if the rivalry is not there, the confusion about morality and ambition is and undermines the value of family relationships. In the York household, for instance, a legacy of ambition appears to bind the generations

[11]Coppelia Kahn, Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 50.

together. Plantagenet receives his stimulus from Mortimer, saying, "Here dies the dusky torch of Mortimer,/ Chok'd with ambition of meaner sort;/ And for those wrongs... / I doubt not but with honor to redress" (1H6.II.v.121-125). Yet his decision "Either to be restor'd to [his] blood/ Or make [his] will th'advantage of [his] good" (1H6.II.v.128-129) raises a question about whether his aspirations are actually inherited or personally inspired. Similarly, Richard of Gloucester, while taking up his father's cause, breaks all family bonds in the declaration, "I am myself alone"(3H6.V.vi.83). The idea of inherited ambition is paradoxical, because although succeeding generations can share similar goals, ambition as a motivation is ultimately self-serving and divisive rather than family-serving and unifying.

For other families, ambition is not seen as a heritage but interferes with the transmission of morality. Salisbury's integrity stems from his sincere belief in York's royal rights and in a commitment to that cause; in Warwick, the drive to control replaces his father's concern for loyalty and honor. Clifford demonstrates valor in defense of the crown; Young Clifford expends his courage in offensive military action designed to destroy his father's enemies rather than to uphold his father's king. Norman Rabkin sees Clifford's family image as an ideal parodied by the Duke of York's family,[12] but the failure of moral inheritance in one and the divisive perpetuation of ambition in the other make neither an ideal. Talbot's family is the one most worthy of admiration, but the limited scope of its inherited virtues prevents it from appearing as a model relationship either.

In fact, the familial authority that legitimates action and establishes mutual values is consumed in the contradictions and perversions of inheritance. No perspective has a broad enough base to produce a valid appeal, and each assumption has its flaws. The positive ideals of chivalry and the negative influences of guilt are both destructive rather than sustaining forces. Ambition appears as an inherited drive to action but fosters autonomous behaviour. Morality, a desirable but variously interpreted legacy, is violated or compromised. Principles of family heritage consequently inspire corruption and confusion rather than consensus and cohesion.

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[12]Norman Rabkin, Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 90.

The confusion of family connections is at the heart of the widespread politicial unrest, for a concern with blood lines develops into the brutality of the blood feud. Don Ricks describes this degeneration of relationships, saying:

> Completely absorbed into the ethics of the blood-feud, the lords abrogate even those patterns of habitual nobility which over the generations have given their class continuity and purpose; and the subsequent viciousness of their crimes assures retributions in kind from their enemies.[13]

Revenge and retaliation become the motivating forces, encompassing and confusing concepts of guilt, ambition, and morality. What begin as appeals for order based on the assumptions of patriarchy shift to proclamations of hatred forming the foundation for vendetta. Kahn aptly points out, however, that the vendetta is nominally "based on the same principle as paternal succession: sons are bound to avenge their fathers (and fathers their sons)."[14] Thus, family functions as a potential means to order or disorder, and one, in fact, shades into the other behind the language of rights and reponsibilities that instigates, while appearing to justify, confrontation after confrontation.

Just as vengeance overshadows the issue of lineal inheritance, the question of legitimate family membership, too, causes contention and unrest. The allegation of bastardy, indicating the violation of natural order and the outcome of immoral behaviour, is considered the ultimate insult. As a type of inherited guilt, illegitimate birth casts individuals outside the limits of family boundaries and beyond the sanctity of family morality. The French Bastard of Orleans typifies the reprehensible conduct expected from a man of his social status. He calls for an assault on England's dead nobility, saying, "Hew them to pieces, hack their bones asunder" (1H6.IV.vii.47), a proposal to which even England's chief opponent, Charles, will not agree. Winchester, the other character of illegitimate birth in the tetralogy, represents familial corruption within England. While Gloucester points out Winchester's tainted birthright to underscore his own moral superiority, Winchester acts in a disreputable manner consistent with his heritage by bribing the Church for a Cardinal's position to offset his

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[13]Don Ricks, Shakespeare's Emergent Form: A Study of the Structure of the 'Henry VI' Plays (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1968), 86.

[14]Kahn, 57.

flawed ancestral authority with ecclesiastical authority. Illegitimate birth breeds illegitimate conduct.

More significant than an immoral past, however, are the many false accusations of bastardy designed to undermine an opponent's reputation. Suffolk and Warwick exchange insults about the chastity of each other's mother (2H6.III.ii). Queen Margaret refers to the "bastard boys of York" (2H6.V.i.115). Richard of Gloucester, recognizing the need for a hereditary right to the throne, encourages Buckingham not only to "Infer the bastardy of Edward's children" (R3.III.v.75) but to rumor the illegitimacy of Edward himself. The unfounded insults reflect more on the questionable integrity of the speakers than on the morality of the accused. As Ronald Berman suggests:

> The idea of moral bastardy comes to constitute more and more of a mocking counterpoint to the passionate claims made on behalf of the privileges of kinship, and derides the righteousness of the protagonists.[15]

Lying to attack their rivals rather than striving to uphold their own respected status, Shakespeare's characters overturn the assumption that inherited birthright justifies and sanctifies one's cause. The exclusive privilege of family membership becomes, like the multiple appeals for divine support, little more than an instrument of political factions as they try to overthrow one another.

Fabricating stories to ensure the respect or obedience of others extends beyond the dynastic feud to the common citizens active in the political sphere. While members of aristocratic families corrupt each others' reputations with rumors of ignoble birth, Joan and Cade invert the practice by repudiating their own legitimate parentage to raise their social status with claims of superior births. Joan, although she says at the begining of the military campaign, "I am by birth a shepherd's daughter,/ My wit untrain'd in any kind of art" (1H6.I.ii.72-73), later contradicts herself with, "I am descended of a gentler blood./ Thou art no father nor no friend of mine" (1H6.V.iv.8-9). Her denial stems from the recognition that authority depends on noble qualities, ancestry being a primary indicator of worth. Cade, likewise, boasts a respected heritage: "My father was a Mortimer - ,""My mother a

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[15]Berman, 489.

Plantagenet"(2H6.IV.ii.39,41). But the witty remarks of his companions and his own confession, spoken in the aside "I invented it myself" (2H6.IV.ii.155), discredit his assertion. Cade relies on assumptions about birthright to command respect as a political leader; Joan does so to persuade those more powerful than herself to pardon rather than hang her. Their false pretensions about family heritage, like the nobles' rumors about unworthy ancestry, reduce the value understood to be inherent in family membership.

Opposing the claims and accusations about birth, which reject the biological validity of blood ties and condemn individuals for the immorality of their parents, is the practice of adoption, which rewards individuals in spite of their heritage and extends family membership beyond the limits of birthright. Although adoption is perceived as a legitimate manipulation of family bonds, Henry's willingness to adopt an heir causes a major political upheaval. When Henry, in defense of his own kingship, questions York, "Tell me, may not a king adopt an heir?" (3H6.I.i.135), York argues not with the principle but with its application to the event of Henry IV's crowning during Richard II's reign. However, although the two contenders initially accept and authorize their agreement, when Henry VI proposes to yield the crown to Richard Plantagenet at his own decease, the very theory of adoption becomes the center of public debate and strife.

Part of the problem is theoretical. The fatherly prerogative to adopt an heir runs contrary to the concept of divine right prevalent in appeals for kingly authority and subordinating the body of the king to the position of kingship. As D.S. Kastan observes, "If the ultimate authority of the crown abides not in the particular person of the king, as the discourse of rule claimed, then in the entailment Henry gives what is not his to give."[16] The prerogative of the king does not include the right to uncrown himself. However, "The agreement is equally inconsistent and ineffectual on the other side. If York believes his title to be superior, he cannot in justice agree to defer the taking of it."[17] York undermines his own claim to right by compromising with rather than conquering his rival. Furthermore,

[16] David S. Kastan, "'To Set a Form Upon that Indigest': Shakespeare's Fiction of History," Comparative Drama 17.1 (1983): 6.

[17] Prior, 116.

theoretically, as his son indicates, York's oath is "vain and frivolous" (3H6.I.ii.27), being made with a usurper whose word is not binding. Thus, Lancaster's adoption of a Yorkist successor is not acknowledged as a legitimating act, because it is founded on inconsistent, conflicting principles of kingship.

The other aspect of the problem is practical, and the unsettling consequences of the flawed agreement are widespread. For Henry VI, adoption necessarily entails disinheritance so that a supposedly legitimate extension of family rights, in fact, violates and excludes hereditary rights. While Margaret condemns her husband as an unnatural father (3H6.I.i.218), Prince Edward questions his decision with, "Father, you cannot disinherit me./ If you be king why should I not succeed?"(3H6.I.i.226-227). Ironically, Henry's excuse, "the Duke enforc'd me" (3H6.I.i.229), does indeed align him with Richard II to whom he initially appealed to justify his own kingship. For both kings, adoption is an inappropriate term implying initiation in a move that is primarily submissive. Henry, by wronging the members of his family, incites them to angry action.

Critics vary in their interpretations of the king's move but fail to note the contradictions that face him. Quinones says, "Certainly Henry's action owes more to cowardice than it does to wisdom."[18] Frey suggests, "Henry, painfully aware that York's title to the crown is better than his own, and that Warwick's power controls the situation, can prevent coming slaughter only by arriving at some compromise."[19] Frey's remark is more accurate than Quinones', for the judgments of cowardice and wisdom seem somehow inappropriate to the particular political dilemma Henry faces, although the King's problem can certainly be viewed as the culmination of his previous injudicious behaviour. Now, however, he has little choice. As a patriarch, he has a duty to sustain and maintain his family's rights. As a national leader, he has a duty to preserve his country's peace by appeasing or subduing the rising faction. The authority demanded of one role conflicts with the authority required of the other, rights contradict responsibilities, and Henry is thus correct

[18]Richard Quinones, "'Linial Honour' and Augmentative Time and Shakespeare's Treatment of the Bolingbroke Line," Topic 7 (1964): 26-27.

[19]Frey, 53.

to imply that power under such circumstances is no longer his own. But a compromise only exacerbates the problem: Prince Edward demands a present guarantee of a future inheritance, York's sons demand a present manifestation of a future promise, both fathers become subservient to the wishes of their sons, and civil strife is the direct result of a familial debate in which the decision to extend membership by adoption is superseded by the more pressing priorities of birthright.

Even within the immediate family, however, common assumptions about loyalties are confused and standard functions of members are inverted. Disagreement and ambiguity about the purpose of and foundation for marriage initiate much of the familial, political conflict. State marriages entail utilitarian motives which both Henry VI and Edward IV ignore by choosing one queen after agreeing to accept another. Henry's foreign marriage is criticized, because Margaret is "the daughter of a worthless king,/ Having neither subject, wealth, nor diadem" (2H6.IV.i.81-82) to recommend him. Edward's domestic union is condemned, for as Montague says, "to have join'd with France.../ Would more have strength'ned this our commonwealth/ 'Gainst foreign storms than any home-bred marriage" (3H6.IV.i.36-38). The two kings display political incompetence and violate kingly responsibility. They do so, however, because they appeal to the emotional motivation of love or sexual attraction also linked to marriage and expressed in the rhetoric rather than the beliefs of Suffolk:

> For what is wedlock forced, but a hell,
> An age of discord and continual strife?
> Whereas the contrary bringeth bliss,
> And is a pattern of celestial peace (1H6.V.v.62-65).

There is yet a third assumption about the foundation of wedlock to which Henry initially appeals (1H6.V.i.26-27) and which Richard introduces in ironic tones when commenting on his brother's marriage: "God forbid that I should wish them sever'd/ Whom God hath join'd together" (3H6.IV.i.21-22). Divine, personal, and practical interests surround the institution of marriage, and underlying them all is the implicit understanding of mutuality in the matrimonial contract.

Such a multiplicity of considerations provides the potential for conflict, contradiction, and manipulation. Henry's marriage is motivated not by mutuality but by love: Henry's love

for Margaret and Margaret's love for Suffolk. It has a utilitarian foundation not for the king but for Suffolk, that he may "rule both [Margaret], the King, and realm" (1H6.V.v.108). As a political motivation for marriage, Warwick promises one daughter to Prince Edward to "assure [his own] constant loyalty" (3H6.III.iii.240) to the Lancastrian cause, while Clarence marries "Warwick's other daughter,/ That though [he] want a kingdom, yet in marriage/ [he] may not prove inferior to" his Yorkist brother, King Edward (3H6.IV.i.120-122). Yet when Clarence reverts to the Yorkist faction, marriage as a sign of political allegiance and power shatters into a multitude of familial and political loyalties. A similar fragmentation results from Edward's marriage to Elizabeth. The widow gains the possibility of sons, the bachelor inherits daughters, the couple in union produce an heir, but the state acquires a hotbed of dissension in which extended families play a significant part. On one side, Elizabeth's brothers are accused of political intrigue, while on the other side Gloucester informs the King, "in your bride you bury brotherhood" (3H6.IV.i.55). Because the characters place one identity or loyalty against another, marriage, the source of family union and growth, breeds discord and instability.

Role reversals within the marriage heighten the sense of state anarchy especially in the families of two prominent political figures, Gloucester and King Henry VI. Eleanor, striving to reach beyond her social position, destroys her husband's privilege as Protector. While she pretends submission, saying, "Follow I must, I cannot go before/ While Gloucester bears this base and humble mind" (2H6.I.ii.61-62), she exposes her true intentions with, "Were I a man, a duke, and next of blood,/ I would remove these tedious stumbling-blocks.../ And, being a woman, I will not be slack/ To play my part in Fortune's pageant" (2H6.I.ii.63-67). Acting as much as possible as Gloucester would, were he ambitious, Eleanor implicates her innocent husband in her crimes. Torn between the divided loyalties of love to his wife and duty to his king, Gloucester loses both public and private pleasure, and, to the detriment of his fellow subjects, must leave the kingdom in the hands of a king who "throws away his crutch/ Before his legs be firm to bear his body" (2H6.III.i.189-190).

In Henry's marriage, the inversion of authority is even more apparent and has a more harmful effect on the political order. Margaret, unfaithful to her husband from the start, gradually assumes a leader's role, while the king obediently submits to her desires and commands. In fact, he fears more than respects his wife, for when Exeter warns him after the disinheritance scene, "Here comes the Queen, whose looks bewray her anger" (3H6.I.i.211), Henry responds to Exeter's "I'll steal away" with "Exeter, so will I" (3H6.I.i.212). Margaret, as Edward says (3H6.II.ii.90-92), essentially becomes the King, but the reversal is not solely her own doing. She and the king are equally responsible: she, because of "Her valiant courage and undaunted spirit/ (More than in women commonly is seen)" (1H6.V.v.70-71), and he because his "church-like humors fits not for a crown" (2H6.I.i.247). Since neither is willing to assume the proper role, there is no mutuality of duty and respect in their marriage.

Robert Pierce blames Margaret for the breakdown, saying:

> She attacks all the values of family - by her unfaithfulness to her husband, by her attempt to rule him and the land, and by her attack on the power and life of Gloucester, her husband's uncle and the last worthy representative of Henry V.[20]

He fails, however, to note that Margaret's most forceful actions are indeed inspired by a familial obligation: her duty as a mother to protect and reinstate her disinherited son. Thus, her political involvements reveal the contradiction in her dualistic family role. When her husband acts unfatherly, she must act unwifely to be motherly. Her responsibilities conflicting, she divorces her husband to serve her son. The family divides itself, the roles of the sexes are inverted, and only Henry, who concludes, "Poor queen, how love to me and to her son/ Hath made her break out into terms of rage!" (3H6.I.i.264-265), is too naive to realize that dissenting loyalties at home breed strife throughout the nation.

For what begins as a contentious issue of family extension develops into chaos threatening family extinction. The ritualistic molehill scene in 3 Henry VI interrupts the turmoil of civil war as a lament on its consequences. The original justification of family loyalties degenerates into an attitude of plunder expressed by one anonymous warrior, "Give

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[20]Pierce, 63.

me thy gold - if thou hast any gold - / For I have bought it with an hundred blows" (3H6.II.v.80-81). Such a motivation for assault produces a form of nation-wide parricide. A father unknowingly kills his son, a son his father. A survivor bewails, "What stratagems! how fell! how butcherly!/ Erroneous, mutinous, and unnatural,/ This deadly quarrel daily doth beget" (3H6.II.v.89-91). Mothers and wives, the king and the country mourn; the griefs of family and state are one. In 3 Henry VI, family identities, mentioned three times more often than in the earlier plays,[21] proclaim the bitter paradox that civil wars caused by families divide and destroy families. The conclusion of the play, marked by Richard's claim, "I am myself alone," and by his Judas kiss on the young prince, offers little hope of restoration or unity in the final play of the tetralogy.

In fact, in Richard III, "Richard is above all a violator of families, a destroyer of the last vestiges of communal ties remaining from the civil wars."[22] Driven by a desire to obtain the crown and to prove a legitimate right to the throne, he views relatives as his opponents for, as he says, "it stands me much upon/ To stop all hopes whose growth may damage me" (R3.IV.ii.58-59). He murders the prince that he blessed with a kiss. Feigning loyalty to his brothers, he sets one against the other to reap the profits of their hostility. He deceives Anne with declarations of love only to kill her in favor of a more politically expedient wife. Norman Rabkin believes that, by Richard III, Richard is motivated by hatred rather than by ambition, that he "kills his family not because he wants to be king but because he wants to kill his family."[23] Richard's own summary of his achievments suggests something quite different, however:

> The son of Clarence have I pent up close,
> His daughter meanly have I match'd in marriage,
> The sons of Edward sleep in Abraham's bosom,
> And Anne my wife hath bid this world good night.
> Now for I know the Britain Richmond aims
> At young Elizabeth, my brother's daughter,
> And by that knot looks proudly on the crown,
> To her go I, a jolly thriving wooer - (R3.IV.iii.36-43).

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[21] Pierce, 66.

[22] Berry, 80.

[23] Rabkin, 95.

His actions are methodical; his kingly goal apparent. Family is at once an object to manipulate and an obstacle to overcome.

By the time Richard approaches Elizabeth for her daughter's hand in marriage, the language of relationships has become absolutely meaningless. Elizabeth questions him:

> What were I best to say? Her father's brother
> Would be her lord? Or shall I say her uncle?
> Or he that slew her brothers and her uncles?
> Under what title shall I woo for thee,
> That God, the law, my honor, and her love[24]
> Can make seem pleasing to her tender years? (R3.IV.iv.337-342).

Ironically, Richard bears more titles than anyone else, but in his quest for the single title of king he has distorted family identities and violated family responsibilities to the point that they are no longer recognizable. According to Andrew Gurr, Richard finally does reach his goal: he is "crowned at the end of Act III as the rightful heir, and his systematic murders of all those with claims to the throne should not be allowed to smother this fact."[25] By the perversity of logic, Gurr's observation is true, but it only proves the paradoxical nature of familial heritage: Richard's "war for succession necessarily becomes a war on succession,"[26] and the legitimacy of a title achieved by such illegitimate means makes a mockery of authority as the right to rule based on family connections.

Richmond's overthrow of Richard appears to resolve the battle of succession with the coronation of the Lancastrian king, Henry VII, and with his marriage to Elizabeth, great-granddaughter of the Duke of York. Richmond concludes, "We will unite the White Rose and the Red./... The true succeeders of each royal house/ By God's fair ordinance conjoin together!" (R3.V.v.19-31). Pierce suggests that "For the first time since Edward III's death, hereditary right and the power and ability to rule have come together."[27]

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[24]It is interesting to note how Elizabeth draws on the various foundations for marriage as she seeks for some way to justify Richard's request.

[25]Andrew Gurr, "Richard III and the Democratic Process," Essays in Criticism 24.1 (1974): 42.

[26]Robert Watson, Shakespeare and the Hazards of Ambition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 22.

[27] Pierce, 99.

Richmond, however, does not clearly establish the source of his legitimacy. By his marriage, he implicitly acknowledges Elizabeth's hereditary rights, yet he offers no declaration of his own ancestral merit. Indeed, as a member of the Beaufort family, Richmond has roots in John of Gaunt's unseemly liaison with Katherine Swynford and thus has a rather ambiguous claim to royal heritage. As Moody Prior notes:

> seen against the minute examination of genealogies and the legalistic claims in the three parts of Henry VI, the absence of any statement about the claims of Richmond to the throne in Richard III, or in the Henry VI plays for that matter, is striking.[28]

But, as Prior continues, "the issue of title is subordinate to the need for a savior."[29] The catastrophic effects of Richard's relentless ambition and the devastation of civil war during the reign of a weak king dominated by powerful lords make any promise of prosperity and peace a welcome relief. The de facto presence of Richard's conqueror, as a man backed with a loyal army and manifesting the honor and integrity of religious values, overshadows any ambiguities about his de jure title. His legitimacy rests by necessity on the family he promises the future, not on the family that forms his past.

The loyalties of family ties leave a history stained with dishonor, disgrace, distrust, and inevitable disunity. Shakespeare, in his first tetralogy, portrays this fifteenth-century social degeneration as a direct result of ideological complexities inherent in the assumption of blood lines as a foundation for public authority. The flexible boundaries of family cause uncertainty. Capable of being extended to include a wide relationship and a distant past or of being limited to a more exclusive group and a more recent heritage, family offers no stable standard by which to measure one's rightness and to justify one's cause. The characters, as they adopt their own concepts of family merit, live in contradiction and conflict. The principle of inheritance encompasses no common values. Multiple family roles are incompatible. The lines of succession intertwine and overlap. The effect is not simply that family brings political roles closer to immediate experience,[30] but that family, as a source of

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[28]Prior, 135.

[29]Prior, 135.

[30]Pierce, 36.

public legitimacy and as a cause of widespread dissent, is a major part of the political experience in the state.

IV. Legal Authority: Enforcement, Interpretation, and Belief

Law, one of the primary sources of political order, is presumably free from the subjectivity surrounding complicated family connections and abstract notions of faith in a God who directs society. Legal procedures follow predictable patterns. Subjects and rulers alike acknowledge the common statutes that regulate public action and protect personal rights. Public consent creates authority, and authority commands obedience. However, as Brockbank says, "Law and order cease to prevail when men cease to believe in them."[1] The key to his remark is understanding law not simply as an independent, impartial standard by which to judge human conduct, but as the foundation of a political relationship requiring mutual obligations on both sides; when either side violates its responsibilities, the relationship breaks down and order no longer exists. Few critics approach the legal complexities of Shakespeare's histories from this perspective. Instead, their interest lies in the technical rather than the relative nature of law,[2] or in the distinction between lawless and lawful characters.[3] In exploring the legal dimension of authority, however, Shakespeare rather than providing a simple dichotomy of the lawless and lawful, dramatizes the process by which law debated, enacted in trial scenes, or violated in rebellion, loses its validity as a source of public relationships. The sanctity of the law depends on enforcement, and enforcement depends on legal interpretations acceptable to legislators, administrators, and subjects alike. In the first tetralogy, the enforcers are not necessarily the preservers of order, assumptions about justice are too various to inspire conformity, and legal rights contradict other sources of authority so that law does not guarantee impartiality and ideological predictability, but contributes to political instability.

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[1]J.P. Brockbank, 115.

[2]Such works include the helpful historical studies by M.B. Mroz, Divine Vengeance, and George Keeton, Shakespeare and His Legal Problems and Shakespeare's Legal and Political Background.

[3]Edward Berry in Patterns of Decay: Shakespeare's Early Histories, for instance, describes law as "a measure of social and political decay" (29).

Just as the background to Shakespeare's drama was not characterized by the theological simplicity assumed by Tillyard, neither was it marked by widespread political complacency. The Elizabethan era was a time of constitutional transition and controversy, and as R.H. Wells suggests, "In his dramatisation of pre-Reformation history Shakespeare is reflecting the political preoccupations of his own time."[4] "In the middle ages, Law and Church had been supreme,"[5] but "With the Reformation there emerged a new conception of sovereignty in which the crown claimed far greater powers than it had previously enjoyed."[6] Theorists contemporary with Shakespeare disputed about the rights and function of the king. Monarchist proponents, such as Charles Merbury, proclaimed that the prince must have "power full and perpetual over all his subjects in general, and over every one in particular."[7] Robert Parsons, on the other hand, stressed the need for legal restraints on royal power, for "a prince ruling by law is more than a man, or a man deified, and a prince ruling by affections, is less than a man, or a man brutified."[8] Similarly, Sir Thomas Smith emphasized the king's subordination to Parliament which "hath the power of the whole realm both the head and the body."[9] Political writers, however, could only encourage the monarch to obey the law; they could not compel him. Moreover, as Edna Z. Boris explains, both in the law and in the relationship between Crown and Parliament, "the precise constitutional balance was not established with certainty."[10] The transition from feudalism to absolute monarchy and

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[4]Robin Headlam Wells, Shakespeare, Politics and the State (Houndmills: MacMillan Ed., 1986), 45.

[5]Baumer, 85.

[6]Wells, Shakespeare, Politics, and the State, 42.

[7]Wells, Shakespeare, Politics, and the State, 42-43, cited from A Brief Discourse of Royal Monarchy as of the Best Commonweal (1581), 40-44.

[8]Wells, Shakespeare, Politics, and the State, 46, cited from A Conference About the Next Succession to the Crown of England (1594), 21-22.

[9]Wells, Shakespeare, Politics, and the State, 61, cited from De Republica Anglorum (1583), 78-79.

[10] Edna Zwick Boris, Shakespeare's English Kings, the People and the Law: A Study in the Relationship between the Tudor Constitution and the English History Plays (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1978), 47.

later to a Parliamentary system, coupled with the shift in emphasis from ecclesiastical to constitutional law, stimulated controversy about the legal rights and responsibilities of the king and provided a context of intellectual activity for Shakespeare's historical drama.

Part of the reason for the political debate lay in the vagueness of the English common law. As Holderness explains, "Common Law is the law of custom and precedent: not a written body of theoretical doctrines or a systematised structure of legal rules, but an empirical assemblage of practices conceived as immemorial custom."[11] He describes an example of the confusion arising from this type of constitutional order:

> The common law could of course be used as a parliamentary argument by identifying Parliament with immemorial custom in resistance to royal prerogative. But defenders of the monarchy employed the same argument: there was certainly an immemorial law, and the king's prerogative was part of it."[12]

A law vague enough to support opposing viewpoints was far from being the consistently impartial body required to clarify and define constitutional matters.

Compounding the ambiguity of legal questions was the conflict existing between the traditional sources of political authority in Elizabethan times. If one tenet of belief held that the monarch was subject to the law, another principal, divine ordination, gave the ruler power above the law and allowed him or her the right to pardon legal offenses. Similarly, while familial succession established a legal right to the throne, the hereditary title was also perceived as a means for choosing God's elected deputy through a lineal progression which cast doubt on Tudor royal legitimacy. Thus, the intersection of divine, familial, and legal rights in the sixteenth century led not to a homogeneous political ideology, but a contradictory, potentially unstable one.

The attitudes of Shakespeare's kings in his first tetralogy illustrate one aspect of this political complexity, the ruler's role as the preserver and subject of legal rights. Henry VI is unsure about common law, the legal theory defining justice, so that while he acts decisively enough in sentencing Gloucester's wife, he seeks the Protector's advice in the case of the armourer and his man, asking, "Uncle, what shall we say to this in law?" (2H6.I.iii.203).

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[11]Holderness, 28.

[12] Holderness, 29.

The following king, Edward IV, asserts his prerogative to supersede the law by marrying Elizabeth, saying, "It was my will and grant,/ And for this once my will shall stand for law" (3H6.IV.i.49-50). But in Richard III, Edward's right appears as a duty which runs contrary to his wishes rather than serving them. When Stanley seeks a pardon for his servant's life, Edward responds, "Have I a tongue to doom my brother's death,/ And shall that tongue give pardon to a slave?.../ You straight are on your knees for pardon, pardon,/ And I (unjustly, too) must grant it you" (R3.II.ii.103-126). His power to annul the law becomes a kind of law in itself which he feels compelled to obey. Ironically, Richard III, the most unlawful of the kings, acts on the assumption that the ruler is subject to the law. He devises a scheme by which to trap Hastings in a remark that can be misconstrued as a sign of treason in order to justify the lord's execution: "Thou art a traitor./ Off with his head!" (R3.III.iv.75-76). As guardians of legal rights, the three kings act in ways that expose the uncertainty about their own privileges and limitations.

In fact, the true upholder of the law, rather than being any of the kings, is Henry VI's Protector, Gloucester, whom Michael Manheim describes as a fifteenth-century Christian humanist and the closest to an idealized figure in the four plays.[13] Unlike Richard, Gloucester displays a sincere concern for the common good, making him a popular leader with the English subjects. Unlike Henry VI, he manifests expertise in legal matters, making him a reliable advisor for the Crown. Unlike Edward IV, he demonstrates impartiality, making himself both a model subject and a good governor. In his private quarrel with Winchester, he promises, "Cardinal, I'll be no breaker of the law" (1H6.I.iii.80), and even when his wife is charged with witchcraft, his grief does not influence his commitment to justice: "Eleanor, the law, thou seest, hath judged thee;/ I cannot justify whom the law condemns" (2H6.II.iii.15-16).

The personification of the law itself, Gloucester ironically becomes a victim both of the lawless acting out the forms of legal procedure and of the lawful abdication of legal responsibility. His opponents, the noble peers, desiring to increase their own power at his

[13]Michael Manheim, The Weak King Dilemma in the Shakespearean History Play (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 92.

expense, accuse him of unlawful conduct. They recognize that in order to achieve respect, to establish an authoritative relationship with Gloucester's favorites, the commons and the King, they must taint Humphrey's reputation for justice while making their own actions appear legitimate. As the Cardinal says, "That he should die is worthy policy,/ But yet we want a color for his death./ 'Tis meet he be condemn'd by course of law" (2H6.III.i.235-237). Their petty complaints are weak, however, and while Gloucester denies them, Suffolk admits, "we have but trivial argument,/ More than mistrust, that shows him worthy death" (2H6.III.i.241-242). Appearing to uphold the law, the lords charge the Protector, arrest him, and promise a trial, although they know full well that if they were to deliver on their promise Gloucester's innocence would condemn them and expose their manipulation of the legal system.

The lawful King Henry is as much to blame for Gloucester's defeat as the lords, because he does not defend when they attack a just and innocent man. Believing of his Protector, "Thou never didst them wrong, nor no man wrong" (2H6.III.i.209), yet he delivers Gloucester to his enemies and simply counsels the lords, "what to you wisdom seemeth best,/ Do or undo, as if ourself were here" (2H6.III.i.195-196). While David Frey suggests that Henry acts properly and "leaves the question of Gloucester's guilt an open question as is required by law,"[14] in effect what the King does is not to submit as a subject of the law, but to turn the legal structure of the nation over to the lawless. Weak and irresponsible, he abdicates his kingly duty and leaves the Parliament not because he wants justice to take its course, but because he grieves too much over Humphrey's mistreatment. As John Blanpied says, "Henry fails to protect his Protector by giving body to the law he represents. Without that valorization, the law is grounded nowhere, it exists nowhere within the play except in Gloucester's articulate presence."[15] Law is meaningless as a presence, however; it functions only as part of a political relationship which in this case has been violated by both sides. Henry believes in the principles, but does not recognize his obligations; the lords know their

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[14]Frey, 42.

[15]Blanpied, 53.

duties as subjects, but do not respect the principles.

The subjects and rulers who become victims of the escalating legal abuse suffer, because rather than acknowledging the mutuality necessary for an effective legal system, they simply trust their own innocence. Henry VI believes in the strength of purity, saying:

> What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted!
> Thrice is he arm'd that hath his quarrel just;
> And he but naked, though lock'd up in steel
> Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted (2H6.III.ii.232-235).

Gloucester depends on the predictable procedures of law, saying:

> I must offend before I be attainted;
> And had I twenty times so many foes,
> And each of them had twenty times their power,
> All these could not procure me any scathe
> So long as I am loyal, true, and crimeless" (2H6.II.iv.59-63).

Lord Say echoes the same sentiments with, "The trust I have is in mine innocence,/ And therefore I am bold and resolute" (2H6.IV.iv.59-60). When their opponents do not willingly submit to the law, however, protection necessarily entails both law and enforcement. When the legitimate and just enforcers are not willing to fulfill their duties or are not capable of doing so, innocence is irrelevant.

Moreover, enforcement depends on valid interpretations of the law, and the Temple Garden scene illustrates complications that can interfere with the process of interpretation. The nobles, who subtly manipulate the course of justice in 2 Henry VI, initiate the breakdown of legal authority as disputants at the court in 1 Henry VI, in II.iv. Their quarrel cannot be resolved, because, first of all, the participants are ignorant of the law they challenge and contend. As Warwick admits, "in these nice sharp quillets of the law,/ Good faith, I am no wiser than a daw" (1H6.II.iv.17-18). Secondly, the lords lack an impartial judge to mediate their argument and make the law operational. The prime contender, Plantagenet, establishes the means for resolution by plucking the first rose, and even the single lawyer present participates in the trial by vote. Thirdly, the nobles are not simply ignorant of state laws, but even disobey their own rules of democracy as they turn from casting votes to hurling insults and threats. As Prior observes:

> In the very sanctuary of the common law, a dispute over an undesignated legal

> question has generated such fierce controversy that the disputants have had to leave the Temple hall and carry their argument in the garden, and the legal issue ultimately gets lost among differences which are neither legal nor intellectual.[16]

The certainty of individual will displaces the ambiguity of common law, for as Suffolk admits, "And never yet could [I] frame my will to it,/ And therefore frame the law unto my will" (1H6.II.iv.8-9). Ignorance, prejudice, and disobedience obscure the necessary process of interpretation that defines statutes in order to enforce them.

In a similar example at the end of the tetralogy, Buckingham, too, "frames the law unto [his] will" by manipulating the flexibility of interpretation. After Richard imprisons Lord Rivers and Lord Grey, the Queen and the Prince of York take sanctuary, a practice common to medeival and Renaissance English law-offenders seeking political protection. Buckingham argues in legalistic terms against the validity of their refuge, saying, "The benefit thereof is always granted,/ To those whose dealings have deserv'd the place,/ And to those who have the wit to claim the place./ This prince hath neither claim'd it nor deserv'd it..../ Oft have I heard of sanctuary men,/ But sanctuary children never till now" (R3.III.i.48-55). Drawing on the need to interpret legal precedents in common law and participating in the general complaint of the fifteenth century against the abuses of sanctuary privilege,[17] Buckingham justifies his violation of the Prince's holy protection and his own part in Richard's conspiracy against England's royal heirs. The law, in its obscurity, can serve the lawless as well as the lawful.

The quest for legitimacy, the administration of justice, and and the legislation of order are complicated not only by interpretations of individual laws, but by varying conceptions of the foundations for legal authority itself. Baumer points out that the medieval conception of law strongly influencing Renaissance theorists specified that the king "is no legislator at all, that he merely 'interprets' a more fundamental law."[18] The fundamental law

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[16] Prior, 106.

[17] George Keeton, Shakespeare's Legal and Political Background (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, Ltd., 1967), 208-209. Keeton describes public efforts to control the abuse of sanctuary and the final abolition of the privilege in 1623.

[18] Baumer, 190.

for the Providentialist Henry VI is rooted in St. Thomas Aquinas's concept of the divine, eternal law of God. Aquinas maintains that "Political authority... [is] derived from God" and that the primary task of the good ruler is the "attainment and maintenance of unity and internal peace."[19] Henry VI, however, is more of a believer in peace than a sustainer of it. He only occasionally asserts his authority, with, "We charge you.../ To hold your slaught'ring hands and keep the peace" (1H6.III.i.86-87). More frequently, he allows God to administer His own judgments, saying, "God defend the right" (2.H6.II.iii.55), or praying, "judgment only doth belong to thee" (2H6.III.ii.140). For Henry, the only laws are God's laws which the King, as "far-unworthy deputy" (2H6.III.ii.286), is rarely justified to enforce. He appears to vacillate between a belief in theocracy and a belief in divinely-ordained monarchy. The erratic fulfillment of his administrative duties undermines the stability of the state.

In Richard III, Clarence, unlike Henry VI, distinguishes between the laws of God and the laws of man but establishes no greater authority for himself by doing so. First, he appeals to the rights of state justice, saying to his murderers in words that echo Humphrey of Gloucester's, "Before I be convict by course of law,/ To threaten me with death is most unlawful" (R3.I.iv.187-188). Secondly, he appeals to the superior law of God, "Thou shalt do no murther" (R3.I.iv.197), but by that law he condemns himself. His only defense, he finally realizes, is based on familial duty, "Alas, for whose sake did I that ill deed?/ For Edward, for my brother, for his sake" (R3.I.iv.211-212), a justification that denies the sanctity of both God's law and man's. But familial responsibilities are not mutually acknowledged either, and Clarence's reward for loyalty to one brother is murder by another. Competing and conflated authoritative sources render the abstract nature of justice a questionable appeal for order and protection.

Natural law, another vaguely defined legal conception of the medieval and Renaissance periods, appears as one of the claims York uses in his pursuit of the crown. O.H. Phillips explains, "Natural law is the law of reason, which teaches the superiority of

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[19]Keeton, Shakespeare's Legal and Poltical Background, 72-73.

the rational nature of man to the animal order."[20] Although this principle of ordering rationality originates in Greek thought, Christian political philosophers such as Augustine and Aquinas incorporate it into their ideologies. When Shakespeare writes his early histories, however, he is chronologically a closer predecessor of Hobbes, asserting his view of natural man as a competitive, brutish creature, than he is a follower of Aquinas, proclaiming his view of man's part in God's divinely-fashioned universe. The contradictory attitudes of Shakespeare's York reveal the ambiguous relationship of natural and divine orders. As a justification for his own power quest, York observes Henry VI's ineptitude and reasons of himself, "More like a king, more kingly in my thoughts" (2H6.V.i.29). Believing in his natural superiority, he declares to Henry VI:

> Here is a hand to hold a sceptre up,
> And with the same to act controlling laws.
> Give place! By heaven, thou shalt rule no more
> O'er him whom heaven created for thy ruler (2.H6V.i.102-105).

The assumptions of legitimacy in his pronouncement are inconsistent. He indicates that the law of reason dictates his right to overthrow a lawful king in order to assure "controlling laws," but acting illegally in the present is a poor way to guarantee legality in the future. Furthermore, York violates the sanctity of the king's position under the ordinances of eternal law with an appeal for divine justification himself. The addition of York's original belief in his legal, hereditary right to the throne only compounds the confusion. Referring to his earlier soliloquy in 2 Henry VI, Berry remarks:

> When York speaks of his right to the throne, it is often difficult to ascertain, as it is here, whether his reference is to rights of property ('claim his own') or of succession ('usurp my right') or of natural superiority ('childish fist,''church-like humour')."[21]

The ambiguity stems from the unclear delineation of natural law. It encompasses various perceptions: legitimate right as tied to religious morality, a rationality subservient to state order, or an unrestricted justification for personal pursuits. York, in conflating the various

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[20]Owen Hood Phillips, Shakespeare and the Lawyers (London: Methuen, Ltd., 1972), 164.

[21]Berry, 43.

interpretations of right, makes his act of force appear like an act of law. In doing so, he confuses the whole issue of legal enforcement, because he fails to distinguish between forcing one's will and enforcing publicly acknowledged assumptions.

Another aspect of legal order that Shakespeare dramatizes as adding to the uncertainty surrounding public legitimacy is the medieval and Renaissance conception of law of arms. As a method for settling individual disputes, the law of arms is portrayed as ineffective. The King is inconsistent, for he dismisses the request of Vernon and Basset, two servants of the opposing Lancastrian and Yorkist factions who "crave benefit of law of arms" (1H6.IV.i.100), but orders the unmatched pair, Peter and Horner, to a trial by battle. Furthermore, a discussion of divine vengeance has already shown Shakespeare's parodic portrayal of the actual military contest. As a method for serving national and international justice, war has its own law of arms, its own order, distinguishing it from murder and rebellion. But the appeals Talbot makes for such order, by inviting the French to fight in open field and by offering them an alternative between peace in their submission or battle in their resistance, soon give way to disorder in which revenge and ambition displace the heroism attainable when military tactics are mutually acknowledged. The opponents Richard and Richmond illustrate the conflicting attitudes towards war. Richmond encourages his army by proclaiming its task "To reap the harvest of perpetual peace/ By this one bloody trial of sharp war" (R3.V.ii.15-16); war has an order and serves an order. However, when Richard declares, "Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our laws" (R3.V.iii.311), weaponry has only to do with aggression and force, not with authority and legitimacy of purpose. Thus, the law of arms both as a channel for individual litigation and as a means to national power and peace proves ineffective, because of its limited acceptance and various interpretations. Added to the perceptions of moral, religious, and natural law, military law only intensifies the uncertainty about rightness which breeds political instability.

When traditional channels of administration are eroded by a conflict of legal values, by weak kings, and by self-assured contenders, the common citizens, caught in an open-ended relationship in which obedience to laws does not ensure enforcement, take justice into their

own hands. With a legitimate grievance, they demand Suffolk's banishment or execution in retribution for Gloucester's murder. Ironically, however, "it is what normally would be considered the most lawless element in the society - the pirate band made up of military deserters - which finally sentences Suffolk to the death-penalty prescribed by law." [22] Right is served by a kind of lynch law instituted by the seamen - a law in which the end justifies the means. The citizens' response is appropriate and the pirates are agents of state commands, but the association of law with political order is abolished, because the authoritative relationship between the rulers and subjects is no longer a consideration in enforcement. Procedures of law are no longer predictable. The King, in fact, merely obeys the commands of the people in banishing Suffolk, and the seamen incidentally serve the common good in responding to their own inclinations.

The juxtaposition of the Suffolk incident with Cade's activities in the following scene indicates that when the common citizens become the legal administrators, anarchy inevitably follows. For while the subjects initiate their political participation "Free from a stubborn opposite intent" (2H6.III.ii.251), they soon join a traitor, develop a mob mentality, and become a "rascal people, thirsting after prey" (2H6.IV.iv.51). Cade, the leader, does not simply rebel against state laws, but becomes a legislator himself, declaring, "burn all the records of the realm, my mouth shall be the parliament of England" (2H6.IV.vii.14-15). In doing so, he travesties legitimate proceedings partly by his petty laws and their severe penalties, but partly by the way he assumes multiple roles which together destroy legal impartiality. As the parliament, Cade makes laws; as a declared king, he administers laws; as a self-made knight in arms he enforces laws; and if pronounced Protector, he promises to be subject to King Henry's laws. Legal rights under Cade have no objective definition. The commons follow Cade until they realize that the union of his self-proclaimed functions guarantees not the liberty of lawful order, but the choice between anarchy and autocratic repression. Justice embodied in the King proves inconsistent, but justice administrated by the citizens leads to no justice at all.

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[22]Ricks, 72.

The necessity of the people's consent for effective authority makes their part in the civil anarchy both significant and ambiguous. Robert Ornstein believes that "Shakespeare sees the commoners more as the victims of disorder than as its many-headed beast and senses that their instinct is for survival, not for giddy change."[23] Edna Boris suggests that, "With the possible exception of Cade, who is closely associated with York and is in fact claimed by York to be his instrument, the lower classes are consistently shown to be well aware of the condition of the realm, to be independent minded and critical of those in decision-making positions...."[24] Cade, however, while incited to arms by York, is not simply the noble's puppet, for the rebel displays ingenuity and independence of mind in his mockery of the legal system and his ability to rise to power. The people, on the other hand, are not always independent and critical of their leaders. Their vacillation between "God save the King" and "We'll follow Cade" (2H6.IV.viii.19,33) reveals their susceptibility to tactics of persuasion which activate what Orstein identifies as their instinct for survival. While they are victims, Cade, who is one of their own, bears a significant responsibility in their affliction. An anonymous soldier, for instance, is murdered for his ignorance of Cade's new demand to be addressed as Lord Mortimer. Furthermore, while they are victims, the commons are also persecutors, who, consenting to Cade's laws, unjustly execute the legal clerk and the noble, Lord Say. Individuals rather than the classes of nobles or commons are the obvious victims. Even Cade becomes a victim of his own riotous behaviour when his followers turn on him. The commons, Ornstein says, is not a many-headed beast. If the commons is not, however, rebellion is the beast, and it is nurtured and brought to life not only by the aggressive, factious lords, but by the citizens whose unpredictable loyalties foster instability.

Rebellion, a legal issue characterized by accusations of usurpation and treason, was a prominent political subject during Shakespeare's time, although the obedience demanded by the Elizabethan monarchy was rooted less in the language of legality than in the principles of divine authority expounded by government propagandists and homilists. Non-resistance tied

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[23] Ornstein, 50.

[24] Boris, 56.

to divine right, however, excludes citizens' rights. As Hart explains, "The homilies teach that subjects have duties but no rights except the right of paying taxes and of enduring oppression in patience and without a murmur."[25] The imbalance of rights created by the conflation of divine and legal assumptions prevents a clear and legitimate political relationship. While Shakespeare dramatizes the suffering and cruelty of rebellion, he does not follow the homilists and portray rebellion as the consequence of violations against God's commands. Robert Burkhart feels that Shakespeare's interest in the early histories lies not in the sin of rebellion at all, but in the unsuitability of kings who deserve rebellion.[26] While Burkhart offers a number of insightful observations about the rulers in the tetralogy, it is difficult to agree that because the pacifist Henry VI "is neither a strong leader nor a capable statesman"[27] he deserves the usurpation that defeats him several times. Given the factious nature of the nobles, the blame can hardly be so one-sided. A more accurate interpretation of Shakespeare's political perspective is that he exposes the simplicity of a pure doctrine of non-resistance as a legal problem: when there is no politically authorized means to compensate for injustice and to replace inept or tyrannical rulers, then civil disobedience is the inevitable response.

In the battle between Richmond and Richard which closes the tetralogy, the issue of disobedience is entirely obscured in ideological contradictions. When Richard earlier seeks democratic support for his kingship, the citizens by responding as "dumb statues" (R3.III.vii.25) do not openly grant it, but by allowing vocal support from a few individuals, they do not formally refuse it. Richard thus interprets their silence as a sign of consent and their subsequent obedience as a recognition of his kingly title. Richmond then appears as a contender for the throne and gains the support of Richard's earlier audience by expounding the doctrine of responsible tyrannicide and saying of Richard:

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[25]Alfred Hart, Shakespeare and the Homilies (New York: Octagon Books, 1970 [Melbourne, 1934]), 43.

[26]Robert Burkhart, "Obedience and Rebellion in Shakespeare's Early History Plays," English Studies 55 (1974): 108, 117.

[27]Burkhart, 113.

> For what is he they follow? Truly gentlemen,
> A bloody tyrant and a homicide;
> One rais'd in blood, and one in blood established;
> One that means to come by what he hath,
> And slaughtered those that were the means to help him (R3.V.iii.245-249).

As a justification for his own political action, however, Richmond's speech conflicts with his own belief in his divine support. On one hand, as Burkhart notes, Richmond places himself unlawfully "in the embarrassing position of being a rebel";[28] on the other hand, as God's representative righting the wrongs of England's civil strife, Richmond is the legitimate candidate for the throne. Similarly, while the subjects commit the sin of disobedience in deserting their de facto king, Richard, they wisely pledge allegiance to a more just and suitable leader.[29] Shakespeare appears to suggest that after a long period of civil strife, power itself rather than the traditional means of authorizing power is the central issue, and whether the people's response is one of obedience or disobedience matters less than the fact that it is their contribution to the restoration of public peace.

Authority is only a type of power when it is based on mutually accepted principles. In the first tetralogy, Shakespeare portrays the breakdown of legal authority not simply as a matter of established laws and trangressing citizens, but as a dynamic web of public relationships eroded by vague and inconsistent perceptions of legality, by the conflict in

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[28]Burkhart, 116.

[29] The issue of civil disobedience in Shakespeare's time was complex. Responsible tyrannicide was a medieval concept. Bullough, however, notes the uncertainty of attitudes in the Renaissance period: "The misrule of legitimate monarchs must be accepted as a visitation from God, but that of usurpers could perhaps be opposed and their removal by the people's leaders might be justified" ("The Uses of History," Shakespeare's World, eds. James Sutherland & Joel Hurstfield (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1964), 105). Baumer explains how "early Reformation pamphleteers had qualified the doctrine of non-resistance by the statement that the king must be obeyed implicitly except when his commands run contrary to divine and natural law" (113), and the exceptions, of course, were subject to the interpretations of the rulers. Wells, similarly, points out the inconsistencies facing the Tudor propagandists: "Having rebelled against established authority itself, the Tudor monarchy had to guard against counter-reform by emphasizing the sin of disobedience" (Shakespeare, Politics, and the State, 393). In light of this ideological confusion, the subjects' duty to Richard III appears more ambiguous than Tudor proponents cared to admit. Shakespeare's dramatization of the political dilemma focuses on the practical rather than the uncertain ideological reasons for the citizens' response.

sources for justification, and by the violation of responsibilities on the part of both rulers and subjects. "Law and order cease to prevail when men cease to believe in them."[30] Law also ceases to prevail when interpretations of it differ, for uniformity of principles breeds conformity of respect and behaviour. And men cease to believe when belief alone is an insufficient guarantee for the enforcement of rights and the maintenance of peace. Thus, as Shakespeare dramatizes it, the political significance lies in the relative rather than the technical or absolute nature of law.

[30]Brockbank, 115.

V. Power: Will, Persuasion, Force, and Fear

Power necessarily exists in a political system: the variations in government and order from one historical period to another, from state to state, and from one public leader to the next are determined not by the presence or absence of power but by its legitimate or illegitimate use. Dollimore and Sinfield narrowly define this dichotomy of power in Shakespeare's history plays as the difference between a theological foundation for action and the lack of such a justification.[1] A broader perspective, acknowledging the influence of divine, familial, and legal authority, sees legitimate power as that which is based on a variety of common ideological assumptions, and illegitimate power as the public ability to act when those assumptions no longer exist. In Shakespeare's first tetralogy, as the stabilizing power of authority breaks down, the characters turn to other methods to command, to control, and to achieve their own goals. A common critical stance is to view the unauthorized power of the kings, nobles, and subjects simply as force or violence,[2] but effective power depends on more than physical aggression. Like authority, power is a relationship among people, and thus an appropriate interpretation of Shakespeare's early history plays, dramatizing the politics of fifteenth-century England, should consider power not simply as force, but as a dynamic element based on the combination of will, persuasion, force, and fear.

Power is as perceptual as it is physical, and a measure of King Henry's political success or failure depends particularly on the perceptual aspect. Power can be defined as a function of capability and will,[3] and Henry VI's primary flaw as a political ruler is that he

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[1]Dollimore and Sinfield, 214.

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[2] Marilyn French distinguishes between legitimacy and power as might or force (Shakespeare's Division of Experience, 59). Wyndam Lewis speaks of power based on force rather than right (The Lion and the Fox, 81). Keeton emphasizes the necessity of military strength for Shakespeare's political competitors (Shakespeare's Legal and Political Background, 273), and Billings distinguishes between political wisdom and power gained in battle ("Ironic Lapses: Plotting in Henry VI," Studies in the Imagination 5 (1972): 46)

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[3]The definition is adapted from Ray Cline's study of international politics, World Power Assessment 1977: A Calculus of Strategic Drift (Colorado: Westview Press, 1977), 34. Cline's formula for measuring the power of nations is:
$Pp=(C+E+M)x(S+W)$ where
Pp=perceived power

has no will to act his part. In the midst of Cade's uprise, Henry VI confesses, "Was never subject long'd to be a king/ As I do long and wish to be a subject" (2H6.IV.ix.5-6). Even before anarchy makes ruling difficult and unappealing, however, the King indicates no desire to exercise the power of his governing position. Regarding the regency in France, he admits, "For my part, noble lords, I care not which,/ Or Somerset or York, all's one to me" (2H6.I.iii.101-102). Thus when he says to Margaret later, "Come, wife, let's in, and learn to govern better,/ For yet may England curse my wretched reign" (2H6.IV.ix.48-49), the defeatism of his reference to his "wretched reign" is more convincing than any determination indicated in Henry's desire to "govern better." The less he perceives himself as a powerful figure, the less others recognize him as one, and, consequently, the less power he has over his subjects.

The pastoral scene in 3 Henry VI only reinforces the representation of Henry VI as an unwilling king and thus inept ruler. The idea of the king as a shepherd of his flock was a commonplace in Elizabethan times. L. Einstein explains, "The prince was described as divinely ordained to be shepherd to his people and the image of God in his realm,"[4] but Henry invokes the shepherd's role more as an escape from his own public duties than as an affirmation of his leadership. The juxtaposition of the king's miseries "when care, mistrust, and treason waits on him" (3H6.II.v.54) with the shepherd's quiet life serves as little more than a fantasy of peace for Henry VI. The contrast between the metaphoric public image of a shepherd (an image applied by York to the more responsible ruler, Duke Humphrey in 2 Henry VI, II.ii.73) and Henry's appeal to the private capacity of the pastoral life makes the scene function less an as ideal of order in the midst of strife than as a portrayal of a weak-willed king unable to reverse or control the escalating damage of civil war.

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[3](cont'd) C=Critical Mass=Population + Territory
E=Economic Activity
M=Military Capability
S=Strategic Purpose
W=Will to Pursue National Strategy
His formula is useful, because it identifies the subjective and objective elements of power.
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[4]Lewis Einstein, Tudor Ideals (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1962), 16-17.

The whole question about whether Shakespeare's Henry VI is a good or bad man is subordinate to the fact that he is an ineffective king. To distinguish him, as Frey does, because "Only Henry acknowledges values in the world other than power"[5] is to ignore the necessity of power for kingship. Henry is undoubtedly one of the many sufferers in the plays,[6] but he cannot be simply an innocent sufferer, because he indicates no willingness to offset the trouble by fulfilling his kingly duties. To say, as Michael Manheim does, that "[Henry] would be as good a king as is humanly possible if men would let him.... he is the one king who has the capacity to rule well"[7] is to imply that good rulership depends on submissive subjects. However, when the common assumptions of legitimacy engendering obedience are absent as they are in Henry's England, an effective king is one who has the determination to rely on resources that will either restore legitimacy or allow him to command without. Henry simply becomes obedient to the wills of others. As one of the few moral characters in the three plays and as a man who grows in his awareness of others' corruption and deception, he inspires the readers' sympathies. Indeed, he deserves respect for possessing many of the qualities of a good ruler. However, as A.W. Levi explains, political power lies at the intersection of two axes, that of goodness and evil and that of strength and weakness.[8] Few of the readers who favor Henry succeed in defending his ability as a strong and thus effective king. His character is expressed in the first half of Erasmus's statement: "It is quite possible to find a good man who would not make a good prince; but there can be no good prince who is not also a good man."[9] And Henry's failure derives less from the insufficiency of his capabilities than from his lack of will.

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[5]Frey, 19.

[6]Frey, 2-3.

[7] Manheim, 107.

[8]Albert W. Levi, "Politics of Shakespeare's Plays," in Humanism and Politics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 83.

[9]Desiderius Erasmus, The Education of a Christian Prince, trans. Lester K. Born (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1936), 189.

At the opposite extreme, Richard succcessfully climbs to the top of the hierarchical ladder largely because of his extreme determination. Descanting on his own deformity before initiating his pursuit of the crown, he concludes:

> And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
> To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
> I am determined to prove a villain
> And hate the idle pleasures of these days (R3.I.i.28-31).

He lacks the capabilities - the armies, the wealth, the prestige, and the subjects - of a king. However, "Counting [himself] but bad till [he] be best" (3H6.V.vi.91), he has the drive to succeed and the purpose of kingship before him. Furthermore, he has the strategies with which to achieve his aim: "Plots have I laid," he says, and "inductions dangerous" (R3.I.i.32). R.G. Moulton calls Richard's mysterious strength the "secret force of his irresistable will,"[10] and certainly it is Gloucester's relentless commitment to one scheme, lie, and murder after another that turns his potential for power into power, and his dream of kingship into reality. In his determination, he is the figure of a Machiavellian politician, for as T.B. Strong says:

> the novelty in Machiavelli's achievement seems to me his claims that states exist and come into being through the exercise of the human will, and that without this exercise of will the continued existence of the state is also necessarily called into doubt.[11]

The rise of Richard's state illustrates the achievement of wilful power unsupported by legitimacy; the degeneration of Henry's state proves the impotence of authoritative ideals unaided by a commitment to the practical needs of government.

Shakespeare dramatizes England's political chaos as the shift from legitimate to illegitimate power - a shift in which the personal will that inspires discord is no longer subordinate to public principles that regulate conflict. Oaths, already shown as unreliable signs of faith in divine sanction or legal rights, are significant as measures of the characters' commitment to particular causes. The causes themselves change, the Lancastrians and Yorkists exchange supporters, but the resolution of the individuals to compel, control, and

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[10]R.G. Moulton, Shakespeare as Dramatic Artist (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), 97.

[11]Strong, 197.

subdue others remains a constant and divisive force. Queen Margaret, contrary to Marilyn French's view that women "have only two choices - to undermine... male power, or to support it,"[12] acts like her male counterparts as she assumes the public role of military leader to further her personal interests. Richard turns the public throne into a place for doing private business when he says to his subjects, "Stand all apart" (R3.IV.ii.1), while "In [his] first act as king, he plots his nephews' deaths as though he were private."[13] The confusion of public and private matters is generated by the necessity of will for action in either realm. The human will is sufficiently flexible and arbitrary to serve interchangeably as an impetus for individual or common purposes, and as Raymond Utterback observes about the first tetralogy, "There is no faithfulness to oath, title, right, or justice, but an aggressive assertion of private wills that accept no discipline from public principle or order."[14]

While will is a perceptual or psychological element of power, persuasion is a technique of political art[15] significant in Shakespeare's early histories in terms both of the historical relevance of Machiavellianism and of the dramatic power in the interplay of language. Felix Raab explains that the philosophy of Machiavelli was widely read in the late Elizabethan era and that while the English response was primarily one of horror, attitudes were mixed:

> [Machiavelli] horrified them, instructed them, entertained them - in fact he affected them over the whole attraction/repulsion spectrum through which basically new concepts are often seen in times of rapid social change.[16]

The stage Machiavel, based on the Italian's reputation as an advocate of evil and political intrigue,[17] became in Elizabethan drama a popular figure, "committing every conceivable

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[12]M. French, 62.

[13]Peggy Endel, "Profance Icon: The Throne Scene of Shakespeare's Richard III," Comparative Drama 20.2 (1986): 116.

[14]Raymond Utterback, "Public Men, Private Wills, and Kingship in Henry VI, Part III," Renaissance Papers (1978): 54.

[15] In terms of Cline's two-function formula for power, the ability to persuade could be considered a capability which individuals possess to a greater or lesser degree.

[16]Felix Raab, The English Face of Machiavelli (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 67.

[17]Prior notes that "The popular idea of Machiavelli was in many respects a

crime, revelling in villainous stratagem to the horrified enjoyment of audiences and the profit of theatrical entrepreneurs."[18] There is no external evidence about whether Shakespeare's knowledge of Machiavelli came from the philosopher's work or from the popular ideas of the time. In his early histories, Shakespeare appears to combine the sources, creating a richness of ambiguity. While the villainy of deception pervades the political activities of his many characters, there is much in their power struggles that provides a more perceptive understanding of Machiavelli's concern for pragmatic political statecraft than a parodic stage figure could offer. Machiavelli declares, "Everyone sees what you seem to be, few experience what you really are."[19] Shakespeare's characters, in practicing the art of persuasion, demonstrate that in terms of power, appearance is often more important than reality, and language more important than the facts it signifies. Indeed, language can create facts.

In 1 Henry VI, both Joan and Suffolk exercise power that depends on words rather than weapons. Joan devises a plan to aid the French soldiers, saying, "By fair persuasions, mix'd with sug'red words,/ We will entice the Duke of Burgundy/ To leave Talbot and to follow us" (1H6.III.iii.18-20). As she succeeds, Burgundy admits defeat with a metaphor that equates the verbal assault with the force of military battle:

> I am vanquished. These haughty words of hers
> Have batter'd me like roaring cannon-shot,
> And made me almost yield upon my knees....
> So farewell, Talbot, I'll no longer trust thee. (1H6.III.iii.78-84)

Margaret Ranald, referring to the women in Shakespeare's histories, says, "Words, then, are the weapons of the powerless and [the] women are ultimately victims of a masculine drive to power, possessing no political strength in their own right."[20] In this scene, however, Joan is

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[17](cont'd) misconstruction, often approaching parody and not based on knowledge of the original work itself" (292).

[18]Raab, 56.

[19] Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, trans. & ed. Thomas G. Bergin (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1947), 52.

[20] Margaret Loftus Ranald, "Women and Political Power in Shakespeare's English Histories," Topic 36 (1982): 54. Ranald discusses Margaret of Anjou, the Constance of Brittany in King John, and Katherine of Aragon in Henry VIII. Undoubtedly if she were to refer to Joan of Arc, Ranald would identify the French woman with

the victor not the victim, and she does indeed exercise political power to the extent that, as D.R. Wineke aptly observes, "Under Joan's leadership the French make the most of their modest military skills, effectively substituting deceit for valor, a substitution that Machiavelli considers worthy of fame."[21] She is Machiavellian in her ability to conquer Burgundy by persuading him to her side.

Suffolk uses tactics similar to Joan's against Burgundy in order to persuade the King to marry Margaret. Henry, whose earlier reaction had been, "Marriage, uncle? Alas, my years are young" (1H6.V.i.21), responds to Suffolk's account of the French woman with, "Your wondrous rare description, noble Earl,/ Of beauteous Margaret hath astonish'd me..../ Either [I am] to suffer shipwrack, or arrive/ Where I may have fruition of her love" (1H6.V.v.1-9). Appearing trustworthy and feigning concern for the King, Suffolk converts another to his own interests by the power of language as he alters a major political decision and increases his own influence at the pinnacle of state control. He, like Joan, is Machiavellian in his manipulation of appearances to achieve desired results. If, as Marilyn French suggests in her discussion of Shakespeare's women, Joan's power is not legitimate because it resides in the tongue,[22] the accusation is not confined to the female characters, for Suffolk is equally guilty of the same charge. In another sense, however, Joan and Suffolk achieve a type of limited legitimacy. Their successful persuasion is a validation by which the persuaded agree to accept and commit themselves to the same assumptions and goals as the persuader. Thus, while Shakespeare portrays the two characters as morally unsavoury, he also represents the political efficacy of their Machiavellian style: French pragmatism defeats English chivalry; Suffolk's deception exposes the simplicity of Henry's faith in truth and

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[20](cont'd) Margaret, who in seeking a masculine form of power is "a violator of the established order of nature" (54). Such an emphasis, however, ignores the political power of language for male and female figures throughout the tetralogy and dismisses the fact that usurpers and competing kings are equally serious violators as the dominating women of what most Elizabethans perceived to be a natural order.

[21]Donald Wineke, "The Relevance of Machiavelli to Shakespeare: A Discussion of 1 Henry VI," CLIO 13.1 (1983): 31.

[22]M. French, 61.

honesty. The reality, as Shakespeare indicates and as Machiavelli says, is that "A man striving in every way to be good will meet his ruin among the great number who are not good,"[23] and political success requires a knowledge of the "should" rather than the "ought" of life.

Richard III is Shakespeare's most detailed exploration of political achievement by Machiavellian manipulation. The dominating titular character rather than one or two minor figures is the chief Machiavel, and the entire play rather than a few scenes is based on the practice of deception. By combining language and gesture in the dramatic performance of numerous roles, Richard persuades others at best to trust him and at least to act in his favor. He does so not by confronting and converting them, but by appearing to act through their wills. Promising Buckingham material rewards for faithful service, Richard ensures that the lord's interest depends on the King's achievements. Subsequently, Buckingham, whom Richard calls "My other self, my counsel's consistory" (R3.II.ii.151), becomes one of the key actors in a series of scenarios. Assuring Gloucester of his own ability to "counterfeit the deep tragedian,/ Speak and look back, and pry on every side,/ Tremble and start at wagging of a straw" (R3.III.v.5-7), Buckingham "[plays] the orator" (R3.III.v.95) with the mayor and advises Richard to "Play the maid's part" (R3.III.vii.51) in the scene with the two churchmen. Together Richard and his other self pretend in order to persuade.

Richard's creativity, however, is the generating source of their power. Scripting, directing, and performing parts,[24] he manipulates the wills of others by what Greenblatt defines as the improvisation of power, the "ability both to capitalize on the unforeseen and to transform given materials into one's own scenario."[25] Richard flatters Anne until she

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[23]Machiavelli, The Prince, 44.

[24]Pierre Sahel discusses Richard's multiple dramatic roles in "The Coup d'etat of Shakespeare's Richard III: Politics and Dramatics," The Aligarh Journal of English Studies 10.1 (1985): 1-8. Michael Neill also notes the power of Richard's theatrical abilities in "Shakespeare's Halle of Mirrors: Play, Politics, Psychology in Richard III," Shakespeare Studies 8 (1975): 99-122.

[25]Stephen Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 227.

abandons her curses and agrees to marry him. He feigns piety and public concern until the mayor offers to crown him king. He pretends goodness and inspires Hastings to say, "I think there's never a man in Christendom/ Can lesser hide his love or hate than he,/ For by his face straight shall you know his heart" (R3.III.iv.51-54). As D. Riggs says of Richard, "He becomes a lover to frustrate the ends of love, a counselor to inhibit the exercise of good counsel, and a patriot to subvert respublica."[26] Gloucester can indeed "add colors to the chameleon" and "Change shapes with Proteus for advantages" (1H6.III.ii.191-192). Frey suggests that "others exist only in their reactions to Richard,"[27] but, in another sense, Richard exists only in his moment-by-moment reactions to others. He has no permanent qualities except his will to achieve. Like Talbot, who relies on his soldiers, saying, "I am but shadow of myself" (1H6.II.iii.50), Richard possesses a creativity and adaptability that translate into an immense power lying beyond himself in the people he persuades to serve and obey him. His mastery consists in his Machiavellian ability to appear what he is not.

Exploitation by persuasion and deceit is not always an effective technique of control, however, and thus force, the common understanding of power, plays a significant part in the political competition among Shakespeare's characters. Persuasion and force exist at opposite ends of a continuum representing gradations of power. From words to blows the power increases.[21] The characters who recognize and capitalize on this relativity of strength are politically effective; the others fail. Humphrey of Gloucester is perceptive enough to have the

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[26]Riggs, 145.

[27]Frey, 105.

[21] The power continuum is a concept taken from a lecture by Prof. R. Wheeler, Political Science 260.6, March, 1986, at the University of Saskatchewan. The continuum begins with pure persuasion, the offering of rewards, and moves successively through more assertive and aggressive tactics from granting rewards, to threatening punishment, to administering non-violent punishment, to exercising force in the infliction of violence and pain. Persuasion is a typical approach among friends, and force is common among enemies. In the immediate achievement of one's goals, violence can always defeat words if only by removing the obstacles, the opponents, in one's way. Shakespeare, however, dramatizes the subtlety and complexity of power: desired immediate results often have adverse long-term effects, and the constantly changing status of friends and enemies in the civil war necessitates the capacity to interchange and combine elements of force and persuasion.

blind-lame man whipped into running when arguments and accusations do not produce a confession of fraud. Henry VI, on the other hand, offers no aggressive alternative to words and assumes that Talbot's chastisement of Burgundy will be sufficient punishment for betrayal and sufficient encouragement for the traitor to return to the English side. Persuasion is the King's only tactic as he approaches allies and enemies, saying, "Stay, gentle Margaret, and hear me speak" (3H6.I.i.257), or "I prithee give no limits to my tongue" (3H6.II.ii.119). Against deaf ears, however, words are powerless: Margaret responds, "Thou hast spoke too much already; get thee gone" (3H6.I.i.258), and Clifford replies, "My liege, the wound that bred this meeting here/ Cannot be cur'd by words; therefore be still" (3H6.II.ii.121-122).

Against violence words are also powerless. Even Suffolk, who demonstrated his adept manipulation of the language of love in 1 Henry VI fails in 2 Henry VI to persuade the violent seamen with his claims, "I am a gentleman:/ Rate me at what thou wilt, thou shalt be paid," or "Stay, Whitmore, for thy prisoner is a prince" (2H6.IV.i.29-30,44). Although the Lieutenant is an inferior verbal artist whose "words are blunt" (2H6.IV.i.67), he is relatively more powerful, because his strength lies in force rather than in persuasion. When his words will not "stab" Suffolk, the seaman responds with "Strike off his head" (2H6.IV.i.69). Say, who meets a fatal end similar to Suffolk's, tries to influence his captors, saying, "You cannot but forebear to murther me./ This tongue hath parley'd unto foreign kings/ For your behoof - " (2H6.IV.vii.76-78). However, his opponents measure power by force and use it themselves. Cade condemns Say as a coward and dismisses the lord's plea, saying, "Tut, when struck'st thou one blow in the field?" (2H6.IV.vii.80). Words against blows cannot compete.

But because power is relative, different techniques are appropriate to different circumstances, and the successful political actors are those who are flexible enough to use the continuum of persuasion and force to their own advantage. York, who accepts either alternative in declaring, "By words or blows here let us win our right" (3H6.I.i.37), convinces Warwick of the Yorkist's legal rights, persuades Henry VI to name him Yorkist heir to the throne, but conquers his opponent Clifford with the sword and prepares to take the crown by

force. Edward IV, claiming, "I challenge nothing but my dukedom" (3H6.IV.vii.23), persuades the mayor to open the city gates for him. Once inside, however, Edward is himself convinced by his own friends to reassert the Lancastrian kingship. As Hastings says, "Away with scrupulous wit! now arms must rule" (3H6.IV.vii.61).

Richard makes the best use of available power techniques in his ability to "smile, and murther whiles [he smiles]" (3H6.III.ii.182). By combining force and deception, he enacts the Machiavellian recommendation to fight by both law and arms, for "a prince must know how to play the beast as well as the man."[29] After Anne agrees to marry him legally, Richard declares, "I'll have her, but I will not keep her long" (R3.I.ii.229). After the princes agree to accept his protection in the tower, he hires a murderer for them. After Hastings accepts the coronation, Richard has him executed. Then the pattern shifts: after Hastings' death, Richard convinces the mayor that "The peace of England, and our persons' safety,/ Enforc'd us to this execution" (R3.III.v.45-46). The difference between Richard and the other Machiavellian actors is that he exercises power in a much more calculating manner, and until he is crowned king, he is primarily an agent of power rather than a respondent to it: he is the persuader, seldom the persuaded; he is the aggressor, never the victim of force. Prior describes him, saying:

> Every detail about Richard is believable as having its counterpart in human experience, but what makes him fascinating is that he combines these qualities and capacities in a degree of consistency and magnitude that places him outside the usual human scale of measure and judgment. Richard is Machiavellianism raised to the nth power, but the nth power is realizable only in the imagination."[30]

As he rises to political heights, Richard is the epitome of strength in his masterful balance of persuasion and aggression.

In the histories, force is commonly linked to the military, and Warwick's influence in the earlier plays is primarily based on military control. He is the noted kingmaker who turns the throne from a permanent into a pliable position. As Utterback observes about the king:

> He is a figure Warwick creates by virtue of his armed might and the strength of his will. There is obviously no public principle in this.... [Warwick] is simply doing

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[29] Machiavelli, The Prince, 50.

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[30] Prior, 309.

> what his power makes possible about the occupancy of the throne, a basis of action potentially threatening to any person placed on the throne.[31]

Indeed, as Warwick shifts his troops from the Lancastrians to the Yorkists and back to Henry VI, he exercises more control than the kings he supports. Queen Margaret labels him "Proud setter-up and puller-down of kings" (3H6.III.iii.157). Warwick boasts of his own political might, saying of King Edward, "I was the chief that rais'd him to the crown,/ And I'll be chief to bring him down again" (3H6.III.iii.262-263). Others adopt the same tactics, and Warwick's complaint, "the proud insulting Queen,/ With Clifford and the haught Northumberland,/ And of their feather many moe proud birds,/ Have wrought the easy-melting King like wax" (3H6.II.i.168-171), applies equally to the accuser and the accused. Stanley Eskin remarks that the infection of politics with what should be purely military concerns is a common theme in Shakespeare.[32] Warwick's role indeed proves that when military power becomes an integral part of the governing process, politics is determined almost entirely by might. The public leaders and acknowledged decision-makers are little more than figureheads dictated to by the commanders of military control.

Shakespeare reinforces the anarchy of lost legitimacy with his animal imagery representing extremes of violence and uncontrollable force. Virginia Carr points out the thematic significance of references to prey, predator, and protector in 2 Henry VI.[33] Suffolk insinuates that Humphrey of Gloucester is like a falcon flying higher than others around him, but Gloucester becomes the prey not the predator. Warwick reflects on the Protector's murder in metaphors of savagery:

> Who finds the heifer dead and bleeding fresh,
> And sees fast by a butcher with an axe,
> But will suspect 'twas he that made the slaughter?
> Who finds the partridge in the puttock's nest
> But may imagine how the bird was dead,
> Although the kite soar with unblooded beak?
> Even so suspicious is this tragedy (2H6.III.ii.188-194).

In the regressive movement of a society governed by such savagery, where only the magnitude

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[31]Utterback, 49.

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[32]Stanley Eskin, "Politics in Shakespeare's Plays," Bucknell Review 15.3 (1967): 53.

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[33]Virginia Carr, "Animal Imagery in 2 Henry VI," English Studies 53 (1972): 409.

of physical force ensures the achievement of one's will, the elimination of Gloucester simply frees the nobles "to act like the beasts of prey they really are."[34] York refers to his own predatory intentions as he addresses the departed Lancastrian group: "I fear me you but warm the starved snake,/ Who cherish'd in your breasts, will sting your hearts" (2H6.III.i.343-344). As the people become like animals, targets and victims of each others' uncontrollable viciousness,[35] politics develops into a zero-sum game in which one individual can gain control by force only at the expense of another's well-being. When physical violence becomes such a dominating force, the chaos engendered by it leaves little room for effective political action by the more passive technique of persuasion.

Fear, however, is the psychological element associated with force, and Shakespeare demonstrates how fear is often as politically effective as physical action. Not only violence but the threat or reputation of force is a means of control. The French heavily guard Talbot in response to his reputation rather than to an immediate show of his strength. Talbot explains, "So great fear of my name 'mongst them were spread/ That they suppose'd I could rend bars of steel" (1H6.I.iv.50-51). An anonymous soldier capitalizes on this power and reports:

> The cry of Talbot serves me for a sword,
> For I have loaden me with many spoils,
> Using no other weapon but his name (1H6.II.i.79-81).

The psychology of fear also works against the English, for Talbot loses the substance of his military strength, his army, because as he says:

> A witch by fear, not force, like Hannibal,
> Drives back our troops and conquers as she lists:
> So bees with smoke and doves with noisome stench
> Are from their hives and houses driven away (1H6.I.v.21-25).

Warwick recounts a similar defeat at the battle of St. Albans:

> But whether 'twas the coldness of the King...
> Or more than common fear of Clifford's rigor,
> Who thunders to his captives blood and death,
> I cannot judge: but, to conclude with truth,

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[34] Carr, 412.

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[35] See also Carol McGinnis Kay, "Traps, Slaughter, and Chaos: A Study of Shakespeare's Henry VI Plays," Studies in the Literary Imagination 5 (1972): 1-26.

> Their weapons like to lightning came and went;
> Our soldiers', like the night-owl's lazy flight,
> Or like [an idle] thresher with a flail,
> Fell gently down, as if they struck their friends.
> ... they had no heart to fight (3H6.II.i.122-136).

Fear and will appear mutually exclusive, and the Yorkist soldiers face defeat, because fear displaces their will to fight. The perception of military strength is as politically influential as the number of weapons or the size of army.

Richard's success, too, depends on his manipulation of others' perceptions. Wilders suggests, "Richard is not even a good Machiavellian: he ignores Machiavelli's advice to the ruler to 'conciliate friends' and make himself 'loved by his subjects.'"[36] Wilders, however, fails to note that Richard acts on Machiavelli's conditional recommendation that "it is much safer to be feared than to be loved, if one must choose."[37] Prior more correctly recognizes Richard's diversity, suggesting:

> Dissimulation is his favorite method, and sometimes it works, but Richard commands not because his political cleverness fools everyone all of the time, but largely because he has created an atmosphere of fear. His success is enormous.[38]

Richard dupes some and cows others. The citizens, who perceive Richard as a man "full of danger" (R3.II.iii.27), discuss the state of England under his control. One citizen remarks, "Truly, the hearts of men are full of fear./ You cannot reason (almost) with a man/ That looks not heavily and full of dread" (R3.II.iii.38-40). The passive silence of the crowd responding as "tongueless blocks" (R3.III.vii.42) to Richard's proposed coronation also signifies fearful resignation. Elizabeth, alarmed by the murder of her relatives, flees with her sons. Thus, Richard's aggression not only removes the individual obstacles between himself and kingship, but inspires a sense of fear that breaks down the defenses of others and broadens his pathway to the throne. As Frey suggests, in contrast to Wilders, "the 'murderous Machiavel' has indeed been set to school by Richard."[39]

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[36]Wilders, 50.

[37]Machiavelli, The Prince, 48.

[38]Prior, 304.

[39]Frey, 110.

The Machiavel fails and falls, however, and Shakespeare portrays his decline primarily in the weakening of the psychological elements determining power. The strength of irresistable will gives way to uncertainty. Anne's mention of Richard's "timorous dreams" (R3.IV.i.84) provides the audience with its first hint of Richard's failing confidence, but his own admission, "none are for me/ That look into me, with considerate eyes" (R3.IV.ii.29-30), marks the beginning of a visible shift in his own perceptions. Ornstein suggests that "The portrayal of Richard's loss of control in the coronation scene is masterful. Thereafter, his uncertainties grow repetitious and his hesitations undramatic."[40] On the contrary, the uncertainties show the gradual erosion of Richard's will by doubts that give way to fear. Following the admission that "none are for [him]," Richard recalls, "Henry the Sixt/ Did prophesy that Richmond should be king,/ When Richmond was a little peevish boy./ A king - perhaps - [perhaps] - " (R3.IV.ii.95-98). His hesitation and the recognition of another's legitimacy weaken his confidence in his own position and control.

Richard's dialogue with Elizabeth demonstrates how a shift in his own perceptions affects his ability to influence others. This courtship scene follows the pattern of Richard's earlier dialogue with Anne, but the mood and results are quite different. Richard manipulates Anne by adopting artificial modes that confound her rigidly formal style.[41] Anne cannot compete with his quick wit. She curses Richard for slaying Henry, who was "gentle, mild, and virtuous" (R3.I.ii.104). He responds, "The better for the King of Heaven that hath him" (R3.I.ii.105). She condemns Richard as "unfit for any place, but hell." He responds, "Yes, one place else, if you will hear me name it.... Your bedchamber" (R3.I.ii.109-112). He has an answer for her every complaint. When wooing Elizabeth, however, Richard is on the defensive rather than the offensive. To Elizabeth's cynical "from my heart's love I do thank thee for [your love]" (R3.IV.iv.261), Richard protests, "Be not so hasty to confound my meaning" (R3.IV.iv.262). When Elizabeth advises how a murderer can win her daughter's hand, Richard responds, "You mock me, madam, this [is] not the way/ To win

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[40]Ornstein, 75.

[41]Pierce, 110.

your daughter" (R3.IV.iv.284-285). Elizabeth twists the meaning of Richard's words, just as Richard manipulated Anne's intentions earlier. In the first courtship scene, Richard had the confidence to say to Anne, "Lo here I lend thee this sharp-pointed sword,/ ... And humbly beg the death upon my knee" (R3.I.ii.174-177). With Elizabeth, Richard lacks the control even to swear an oath without being interrupted, challenged, and opposed. As R. Reed observes, "In the second courtship scene, Richard is obliged to rely on carefully chosen patterns of logic, more like the schoolmaster than the buoyant adventurer of the scene with Anne."[42] Hamilton suggests that Richard triumphs over Elizabeth, but does so by cursing himself and swearing away his future.[43] Stephen Tanner appears more correct in calling Elizabeth the victor.[44] When she leaves, saying, "I go. Write to me very shortly,/ And you shall understand from me her mind" (R3.IV.iv.428-429), she has gained more in her confrontation of Richard by thwarting his dominance than she promises to give or does in fact lose by merely agreeing to speak to her daughter. Richard's power is compromised by his loss of confidence, and his claim to victory in the words, "Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman!" (R3.IV.iv. 431), is an unconvincing repeat performance of his speech, "Was ever woman in this humour woo'd" (R3.I.ii.227). His brief boast is interrupted by Ratcliffe's announcement of Richmond's approaching power.

Following the battle of wits with Elizabeth - the initial, subtle revelation of Richard's declining influence over others - his loss of control becomes more rapid and apparent. He confuses his commands to Catesby and Ratcliffe and orders them to go without giving them a mission. He blames his friends in the north for not anticipating his desire for their support in the south. His plans are no longer clear and methodical. The power function of will and strategic purpose[45] no longer impels him forward. The ability to improvise around the

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[42]Reed, 117.

[43]A.C. Hamilton, The Early Shakespeare (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1967), 201.

[44]Stephen Tanner, "Richard III Versus Elizabeth: An Interpretation," Shakespeare Quarterly 24 (1973): 468.

[45] Cline, 34.

unexpected is no longer his own. Richard openly admits the cause: "I have not that alacrity of spirit/ Nor cheer of mind that I was wont to have" (R3.V.iii.73-74). Finally, he confronts the debilitating psychological reality of fear, dividing the self against the self, when in his soliloquy he asks:

> What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by.
> Richard loves Richard, that is, I [am] I.
> Is there a murtherer here? No. Yes, I am.
> Then fly. What, from myself?...
> Alack, I love myself....
> O no! Alas, I rather hate myself (R3.V.iii.182-189).

Fear controls Richard to the extent that although he has three times as many soldiers as Richmond, he feels powerless and admits, "By the apostle Paul, shadows to-night/ Have strook more terror to the soul of Richard/ Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers" (R3.V.iii.216-218). With desperation he makes his call for victory in battle, and in despair he gives his final words:

> Slave, I have set my life upon a cast,
> And I will stand the hazard of the die.
> I think there be six Richmonds in the field;
> Five have I slain to-day in stead of him.
> A horse, a horse! my kingdom for a horse! (R3.V.iv.9-13).

Richmond's army is confident, and Richmond kills Richard. But Richard's defeat is determined as much by the psychological decay within himself as by the military strength of his opponent.

A.W. Levi's dialectical structure of kingship focusing on the intersection of strength and weakness with goodness and evil provides a measure for Richard's government as well as for Henry VI's.[46] Richard, unlike Henry, begins as a strong character, assertive, aggressive, and uninhibited by moral standards. The Yorkist king has the energy and knowledge to command without relying on the ties of mutuality or reciprocity. But Richard is defeated by the cruelty and violence that make him king, and Shakespeare's characterization suggests that a strong but evil king is as ineffective as a good but weak king. Levi defines three dimensions of power: its strength, its constitutional legitimacy, and its moral validation.[47] From this

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[46] Levi, 83.

[47] Levi, 74.

standpoint, as Richard relies on strength to seek constitutional legitimacy, he moves farther and farther away from a moral validation of his actions. As Wilders observes, after each successive murder, Richard is less able to preserve the appearance of honest piety.[41] One after another, Richard's disillusioned supporters either meet a fatal end or leave his side. By the time Buckingham and Stanley change allegiances, Richard's ineffective efforts to appear morally upright result even in the loss of his physical, military strength. Moreover, when Richard finally faces the reproach of his own conscience and fails to convince not only others but himself of his legitimate kingship, the game of illusions and deception is over. And when fear exceeds Richard's capacity to apply force, his ability to exercise political power is gone. Machiavelli recommends a state governed by fear and deception. In Richard III, Shakespeare portrays the limitations of such a philosophy in a Machiavel who cannot maintain a purely pragmatic style in a moral world. In one sense, Richard fails in the Machiavellian test of undaunted strength; in another sense, Machiavelli's theories in their immediate application fail or betray Richard.

In his early histories, Shakespeare presents power as a combination of subjective and objective elements, as a function of will, persuasion, force, and fear. The ability to govern and achieve goals is for the individual kings and subjects in the plays determined by their strengths relative to the capacities of others and by the fluctuating perceptions of everyone in the state. Power is dynamic: it is both political and dramatic. James Winny, who insists that the political commentary in the histories is secondary to the imaginative experiences they enact,[42] does not see clearly that Shakespeare incorporates the two elements into a living art in which the creativity of his characters directly affects their ability to control others, and in which politics is portrayed as an activity dependent on the skillful use of language and gesture as well as on the exertion of physical action. The power of Shakespeare's drama, to quote the title of Moody Prior's study, lies in "the drama of power."

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[41]Wilders, 49.

[42]James Winny, The Player King (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), 41-42.

Conclusion

John Alvis advances the question, "Is Shakespearean wisdom and Shakespearean art a political thing or something beyond politics?"[1] For the first tetralogy, the answer must surely be that Shakespeare's art is a political thing not in the sense that the dramatist presents a political bias or offers a unified ideological perspective, but rather that through his characters he portrays the complexity of political life generated by the interaction of individuals and ideas in the context of community. And the wisdom in his early works about the intense competition among kings, subjects, and nobles lies not in the expression of something beyond politics, but in Shakespeare's dramatization of the broad scope of political action. In categorical terms, Alvis says:

> Politics does not exhaust Shakespeare's subject. We see political life transacted within horizons that enfold other human activities; principal among these are sexual love, friendship, divine worship, the interactions of kinsmen, personal combats, and, in rare instances, the pursuit of private contemplation.[2]

In a close analysis of the first tetralogy, however, we see how each one of these activities has, in fact, become political.

For politics is based on relationships of power and authority, and the dynamic nature of relationships cannot be limited by references to explicit laws or by focus simply on the functions of public office. The quest for legitimacy at the center of the dramatic action sends the characters to public and private sources, to concerns of the past, present, and future, in pursuit of common assumptions and beliefs that will build their political support and unify the English nation. Their efforts fail, because appeals for order by opposing sides - appeals to family succession, to the foundation of law and its objectivity, to the divine justification for government - conflict, and appeals made by individuals or single factions expose the contradictions in the multitude of ideological assumptions. The inconsistency only engenders uncertainty that adds fuel to the flames of civil strife. In the conditions of declining and lost legitimacy, power depends on competition rather than mutuality, and competition relies on

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[1]Alvis, 25.

[2]Alvis, 5.

any subtle or violent means available for controlling and manipulating others. Shakespeare's first histories portray this complexity of politics in the tension of rights and capabilities. If a weakness of his Henry VI plays lies in their vast cast of characters complicating stage productions, and if a complaint about Richard III is that the dominance of one character overshadows the significance of others and that the conclusion is too conventional and conservative, the strength of all four plays lies in Shakespeare's insights into the dramatic nature of politics - into the dynamics of relationships, the subjectivity of interpretations, and the ambiguity of ideas.

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